

TRADITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MEDIEVAL ENGLISH DRAGON



LESLEY CATHERINE KORDECKI

Centre for Medieval Studies

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LESLEY KORDECKI

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TRADITIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH DRAGON

Committee in Charge:

Professor C. Saas, Chairman
Professor J. Allen, External Examiner
Professor C. Chase, Supervisor
Professor L. Eleen
Professor R. Frank
Professor G. Rigg, Internal Appraiser
Professor N.P. Zacour

BIOGRAPHY

Name: Lesley Kordecki

Date of Birth: March 26, 1951

Place of Birth: Kenosha, Wisconsin

Degrees Held: B.A. 1973 Marquette University

M.A. 1976 University of Toronto

Graduate Studies:

Major Subject: Old and Middle English Literature

Minor Subjects:

Latin Palaeography

Fr. Boyle

Medieval Archeology and Art History

Fr. Sheehan

Title: Traditions and Development of the Medieval English Dragon

This study documents the major occurrences of the dragon motif influential to its development in medieval English literature. The organizational principle is also my method of interpretation of the material, that is, I see the motif operating in either the non-symbolic capacity of animal, the polyvalent level of symbol or the sign level in which the motif evokes a single meaning.

A valid estimation of the medieval perception of the dragon, be it substantial creature or poetic image, requires an investigation of the commonly held beliefs about and literary uses of that class of fabulous creatures to which the dragon belonged. The medieval aesthetic embraced the figure of the monstrous animal in certain genres and I trace a number of recurring monsters historically through the most influential travel writings, encyclopedias, bestiaries and biblical exegeses. Quite clearly, the material presents instances of both literal and metaphorical uses of the motifs.

After acquiring this more general feeling for the medieval monster's place in the language and learning of these centuries, I return to the important, expansive, controversial, or in any way helpful witnesses. From them, a detailed, comprehensive understanding of the dragon itself perceived as an animal becomes visible. Similarly, authoritative writings reveal the creature's ^{symbolic} essence as much in its contrived and imaginative attributes as in its varied and carefully construed meanings. Shades of meaning and shifting portrayals of the creature

in the plastic arts are examined briefly at each interpretive level--animal, symbol and sign.

These traditions provide insight and background to the dragon image found in secular literature, especially with regard to its physical attributes, habitat and possible symbolic intonations. Other traditions, however, are known to have influenced not only these aspects but the role the dragon plays in the narrative. For these, I turn to the areas of folklore and mythology and gather the oftentimes ancient dragon stories which may have found their way into the writings of medieval English authors.

Armed with weaponry of these investigations, I approach selected genres of Old and Middle English literature with an eye to following, documenting and, at times, theorizing about the development of the dragon motif over the centuries. In the area of saints' lives, where the dragon's equation with the devil is the prevailing interpretation, I note the degeneration over the centuries of the polyvalent symbolic level into the more rigidly defined and single-minded level of sign.

After an appraisal of the dragon occurrences in English romances, I found a similar tendency. In this genre, however, the dragon image does not invariably connote Satan; military prowess more often is the thrust of the image, in the romances which exploit the portentous power of the creature. Furthermore, the dragon continues to operate on a non-symbolic animal level in these stories.

Finally, I apply these same traditions and method of interpretation to the Old English Beowulf and discover that

this relatively lengthy treatment of the dragon motif reflects a rich symbolic level. Research into the poetic history of the Old English terms used to describe the creature confirms an ambivalent, complex and subtle utilization of the image in this work.

My data and conclusions form a small body of information which can be used as a springboard for further research in this, as yet, little-known area. Investigation into the grotesque, or monstrous elements of medieval literature will, perforce, involve the scholar in fundamental questions of aesthetic principles beneficial to any study of the medieval perspective.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.M.	British Museum
B.N.	Bibliothèque Nationale
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
C.C.C.C.	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Durham Cosin	Durham, University Library, Cosin Collection
EETS	Early English Text Society
<u>P.L.</u>	J. P. Migne, <u>Patrologiae cursus completus . . . Series latina</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association</u>

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Problem.

A universal reaction of the London critics to Virginia Woolf's Orlando when it was first published in 1928 was surprise, confusion and ultimate disappointment that such a promising serious writer had resorted to the frivolity of the fantastic.¹ Orlando broke, or at least bent, the strictures of sex (by having the hero turn heroine in the middle of the book) and time (by having Orlando live over three hundred years). Fashion for realism in the plastic arts comes and goes as is fashion's habit, but the fashion for realism in the literary arts fought a long battle, and has since made its position so tenacious that we no longer consider realism a fashion, but have fallen into the error of considering it a criterion for excellence.

This peculiarity of aesthetics is especially fatal to the modern critic of medieval literature and even medieval art, for non-realism takes many forms, some acceptable, some

¹ Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

not, and medieval art is not to the taste of many modern men. Criticism, however, has come a long way in the twentieth century, and medievalists no longer find themselves perpetually defending the literature as the slightly wayward unrealistic caprices of the unsophisticated medieval writer. For him (and now for his critics) magic swords were magic swords, saintly miracles were saintly miracles and, what is more to the point here, monsters were monsters. We now trust in the integrity of the writing--if not the complete credibility of the writer. Our problem is now to appreciate the literature and art for their fantastic elements and, possibly, in a perfectly serious and discriminating way, to like them.

For the most part, however, this has not been the road criticism has taken.² We are by necessity answerable to our own defined aesthetics. Hence, critics, to be fair to their material, have taken a decidedly objective, even detached, attitude when approaching fabulous aspects. This presents no obstacle in textual work and little in source study, but it prevents a satisfying appreciation of the literary artistry of works involving monsters. The monster no longer preoccupies investigations of technique and interpretation because it is no longer commonly used by literary artists today.³

² A step in this direction was taken by J. R. R. Tolkien in Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics, Gollancz Lecture, 1936 (London: British Academy, 1960).

³ The current influx of the fantastic in popular

One development in criticism which has affected the study of the monster is the realization that the medieval man's perception of the world and literary expressions of it followed philosophical tenets very different from our own. Namely, he believed in the world as symbol.⁴ From this understanding of the theological foundations of medieval Christianity, we have readjusted our interpretation of medieval literature. Rhetorical studies have accented this as well. We are now aware of the "integumentum" employed by medieval writers.⁵

One of the unfortunate results of this valuable scholarship was the identification of monsters in literature as necessarily symbols of something else. This kind of interpretation has proven a convenient loophole for critics uncomfortable with the dragon in an otherwise noble and sophisticated work.

literature was in part sparked by science fiction. The inevitable flavour of the unbelievable, futuristic or the purposefully antiquarian separates the modern man's more artificial treatment of the monstrous from the medieval man's.

⁴ See M.-D. Chenu, "The Symbolist Mentality," in Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century, ed. and trans. J. Taylor and L. Little (France, 1957; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 99-145.

⁵ See Edouard Jeauneau, "L'usage de la notion d'integumentum à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches," Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age, 24 (1957), 35-100.

Criticism has come one step further. We now try to distinguish theology and philosophy from literature without ignoring their influences. We now attempt to sort out geography and chronology when defining traditions, and we are fast accumulating accurate source studies and analogues to specific works. Dragon material evokes comments from fields as disparate as psychology, anthropology, linguistics, comparative mythology and folklore studies.

A further distinguishing characteristic of previous dragon studies is the unwillingness of literary critics in general to cross designated boundaries. The dragon as it occurs in pre-Conquest saints' lives is seen in the light of that defined area. The dragon in a first-century fable or a thirteenth-century saga is separated not only by a millenium, but also by half a continent. More importantly, the form of the writings and the intent of the writers are highly distinct in fables as opposed to sagas. The literary critic, rightfully, must be true to the text and not extract and generalize to the point where context and individual artistry are sacrificed.

On the other hand, history of ideas and development of traditions are necessary to any thorough understanding of a given work. In the realm of monsters, work of this kind has been done in art criticism and folklore studies.⁶ The

⁶ See Rudolf Wittkower, Allegory and the Migration of Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977); Francis Klingender,

problem, then, is to develop a procedure for analyzing literary material which will place the dragon in its proper tradition and at the same time determine how it is used in its individual context.

My investigation will be two-fold. First, it is necessary to establish the nature of the dragon tradition as it existed in the Middle Ages. For this I draw on whatever pertinent literary or artistic evidence is available. Specifically, this includes information on mythology, literature and art from the Mesopotamian origins of the dragon, through the classical developments (epics, fables, encyclopedias, travel accounts and their accompanying illustrations), to the Middle Ages proper. Here bestiaries and travel documents, the Vulgate and major exegeses, northern mythology and sagas will be considered. All will be instrumental in evaluating the specifically English, specifically literary uses of the dragon in the Middle Ages, which will involve Beowulf, and the extant English saints' lives and romances. Once a clearer idea of the dragon tradition is established, the concluding part of the investigation will be possible--an analysis of English literary dragons in light of this

Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages, ed. Evelyn Antal and John Hartham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); and Gilbert Lascault, Le monstre dans l'art occidental, un problème esthétique (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973). Also see Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, rev. and enl. ed., 6 vols. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1955-58).

tradition.

Because the dragon has so frequently been used as a symbol for the devil or evil in the Middle Ages, special attention will be given to the evolution of this meaning and its effect on the dragon motif. I will demonstrate the progressive narrowing of the symbolic range of the motif particularly visible in saints' lives written over the centuries. This evolution, essentially resulting in the equation of dragon with devil, compounds the problem of evaluating the motif in individual contexts.

Method of Interpretation

This plan, however, does not account for inevitable discrepancies in the interpretation of the English dragons. Even the most carefully documented and generally accepted historical background leaves individual literary works open to conflicting interpretation. The dragon as idea, image, motif, character or narrative device is not static through the long period designated in this study. It cannot be handled as if it were a completely concrete subject followed through literary and artistic developments such as a helmet, nor as a completely abstract subject such as love. It cannot be handled as one would the Grail, because at times it proves to have no further meaning beyond itself. Finally, it cannot be handled even as one would the nightingale, evolving at

times into pure symbol, because the dragon is fundamentally different from the nightingale: the dragon is a creature of the imagination--even if sincerely believed in by individual writers and artists. Certainly, as even the believers would have had to admit, it was rarely seen. It derives its power from this fact, much as the rhinoceros did for those Englishmen who never saw one. It was a monster, and as such possessed a certain shadowy, but polysemous quality which is the source of much of its power. Moreover, as will be shown later, it is possibly the most primal monster, and this leads interpretation to the farthest limit of symbol.

The dragon in different works will be seen to cover an entire range. It will occur as straight animal with no accompanying meanings. It will occur as animal-as-symbol with one or more meanings. And, finally, it will occur as meaning with no real existence as animal. This breakdown is important to the tradition that will be traced as well as the analysis of the English literary dragon, and therefore is explained in more detail here.

A. Animal

When a dragon occurs in a medieval text, we are usually aware of two things: it is an imaginary beast, and it may be a symbol of something else. These two observations often and easily go hand in hand. The polysemous quality of the monster

renders it perfect for creative symbolism on the part of the writer or artist.⁷ Frequently this does happen but not necessarily. The dragon as we now define it is a mythical beast with no existence in the real world.⁸ In medieval writings, especially those with no symbolic content, we are more likely dealing with an animal that, in the mind of the writer, is no less real than a giraffe.⁹ A strong written and artistic tradition existed which we can classify as dragon-as-animal.

The first difficulty, which too often becomes a stumbling block for further research, is an adequate definition of the word dragon. This becomes critical in limiting that body of material which deals with the dragon-as-animal. In later English writings authors designate what critics generally agree are dragons with words such as serpent, snake and worm.

⁷ Lascault, pp. 267ff.

⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary lists as definition of "dragon": 1) huge serpent or snake (obsolete) and 2) mythical monster, represented as a huge and terrible reptile, usually combining ophidian and crocodilian structure . . . generally represented with wings and sometimes breathing out fire. The heraldic dragon combines reptilian and mammalian form with the addition of wings.

⁹ The giraffe, called camelopardus, in the western literary tradition was just as much an apparent composite monster, as is indicated by its name, combining camelus and pardus. "Camelopardus dictus, quod dum sit ut pardus albis maculis superaspersus, collo equo similis, pedibus bubulis, capite tamen camelo est similis." Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, Etymologiarum sive originum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), XII, ii, 19.

In Greek some standard terms were δράκων, σκώληξ (worm), σαύρος (lizard), ἔχιδνα (snake), ὕδρος (water snake), ὄφεις (serpent), βασιλισκος (basilisk). In Latin we find draco, serpens, aspis, hydra, anguis, and regulus and in German Drache, Schlange and Lintrache. Old Norse uses dreki, ormr, naðr and Old English wyrn, nicor, orc and nædra.

The Greek word δράκων -οντος evolves from the second aorist stem δρακ- of the verb δερκόμεναι which means "to see" or "to see clearly." This etymology, interesting with respect to the more portentous aspects of the animal, may also refer to a physical attribute. The verb δερκόμεναι can be used in the sense of the gleaming of the eye. Dragons have been described as having shining eyes--a possibly original attribute of the creature.¹⁰ Other well-known characteristics are wings, coiled tail, one to nine heads, serpentine or reptilian body, two or four legs, scales, horns, fiery breath and several different colours. These characteristics, however, are highly variable. St. Martha's dragon, for example, as reported in the early fourteenth-century South English Legendary was

¹⁰ This attribute is found in an Old English version of the Life of St. Margaret. See Passio beatae Margaretae Virginis et martyris in Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben, ed. Bruno Assmann (Kassel: Georg H. Wigand, 1889), p. 175.

A luper dragon þer was wiþ alle . þat slou men wel wide
 He was half best & half fiss . grettore þanne eny ox
 And lengore þanne eny hors . þo he was fol woxe
 Hoked were is tep & longe . for best he was to fore
 Þer ne wende nomon þer aboute . þat is lif nas sone forlore¹¹

We have only to look at two artistic representations of the beast to appreciate its vastly changing countenance. Figure 1 shows a late (1515) rendition of the creature described above which accentuates the bestial rather than the serpentine qualities of the dragon.¹² In contrast note the significantly altered features of the animal in a contemporary sculpture of St. Michael and the Apocalyptic dragon (figure 2).¹³ Here the satyr-like figure becomes hardly recognizable as the same creature. St. Martha's dragon, in this depiction, stresses the composite nature of the dragon. It is obviously the prescribed half beast and half fish, whereas St. Michael's dragon has a human face, reflecting the Lucifer/fallen archangel aspect appropriate to this particular heavenly combat. These are but two of the many diverse representations of the dragon in the Middle Ages.

¹¹ South English Legendary, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, publ. for the Early English Text Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), Vol. 235, p. 349.

¹² Figure 1 is from Jacqueline Boccador's Statuaire médiévale en France de 1400 à 1530, 2 tomes (Zoug, Switzerland: Clefs du Temps, 1974), II, plate 132.

¹³ Figure 2 is from Boccador, I, plate 71.

In defining the dragon, then, I must allow for the intentions of the writer/artist and adhere to the categories outlined above. The dragon-as-animal, logically, has its basic definitions recorded in natural history accounts, the same as the lion or whale. Technically, the tradition starts with travel accounts of journeys to the East dating from the fifth century B.C., but we are not on firm ground with respect to the dragon until Pliny's Natural History.¹⁴ This work begins the development of the dragon-as-animal.

Plinius Secundus (c. 77 A.D.) provides us with a particularly suitable work to consider at this point. The difficulties encountered in his text are those which direct the reader's attention to the problem of definition. Although his many-volumed Naturalis historia has over thirty individual references to the word draco -onis, clearly in well over half the occurrences he had a large snake or particular kind of fish in mind. In one instance he classifies the draco as one of the multitudinous varieties of serpentes and lacertae with no special qualifications.¹⁵ Still, we observe that.

¹⁴ The fragments of Megasthenes (303 B.C.) mention flying serpents (see below, p. 115). Mythological dragons, of course, antedate these accounts, but they do not properly belong in this section.

¹⁵ Plinius Secundus, Natural History, ed. and trans. Harris Rackham, 10 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1938). Snakes and lizards, however, were sometimes construed as omens, as later English dragons were: "Exta serpentibus et lacertis longa. Caecinae Volaterrano dracones emicuisse de extis laeto prodigio traditur . . ." (XI, 197).

even the most careful translators have difficulty avoiding the word "dragon" in rendering passages like the following into English.

Draco non habet venena. caput eius limini ianuarum subditum propitiatis adoratione diis fortunatam domum facere promittitur, oculis eius inveteratis et cum melle tritis inunctos non expavescere ad nocturnas imagines etiam pavidos, cordis pingue in pelle dorcadum nervis cervinis adalligatum in lacerto conferre iudiciorum victoriae. . . .¹⁶

Pliny refutes many of these charms as "mendacia Magorum" but feels obliged to relate them in his volumes concerned primarily with remedies.

Other problematic passages refer to the draco's constant feud with the elephant (VII, 32), how the mixed blood of the draco and elephant produces cinnabar (XXXIII, 116), how after dracones licked Melampus' ears, he could understand the language of birds (X, 137), how the draco guards a grotto (XVI, 234), and how a medicinal stone is taken from the draco's brain (XXXVII, 158). With a knowledge of the ensuing written tradition, it becomes clear that in these instances we are referring to characteristics of the creature which we

¹⁶ "The dragon has no venom. Its head, buried under the threshold of doors after the gods have been propitiated by worship, brings, we are assured, good luck to a home; those rubbed with an ointment of his eyes, dried and beaten up with honey, are not panic-stricken, however nervous, by phantoms of the night; the fat of the heart, tied in the skin of a gazelle on the upper arm by deer sinew, makes for victory in law suits . . ." (Pliny, XXIX, 66, trans. Rackham).

now call dragon. Whether at this early date Pliny was thinking of such a creature is not known. Curiously, his heavy influence on the development of the dragon-as-animal may have sprung from innocent descriptions of pythons or fish. Although it is true that he uses dracones to describe the snakes on Athena's Gorgon head (XXXIV, 76), it is also true that Ovid had by this time left no doubt as to the characteristics of the mythological draco.¹⁷

When the encyclopedist Caius Iulius Solinus addressed himself to the problem in his Collectanea rerum memorabilium¹⁸ in 218 A.D., we find a much more limited use of the term draco. A considerably shorter work than the lengthy Naturalis historia, the Collectanea has understandably fewer references to the draco. Almost the whole of Solinus' work is taken from Pliny. Still, his selection of material influenced man's perception of his natural world for many centuries. His account is filled with the most fabulous elements found in Pliny. Solinus essentially mentions the draco in only two passages. These are the draco's constant feud with the elephant (112, 18) from Pliny VIII, 33 (and somewhat expanded) and a selection of unknown origin declaring dracones abundant in Ethiopia, to have small mouths and to kill with their

¹⁷ Jason and the dragon--Met. IV, 647 and VII, 149; Medea's dragon-steeds--Met. VII, 350.

¹⁸ Ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1895).

tails (132, 17). This is followed by Pliny's (XXXVII, 158) account of the dragon stone, again expanded.

At nearly the same time, a Roman named Claudius Aelianus wrote the natural history known as the De natura animalium in Greek.¹⁹ His approach in dragon passages is once again different, concentrating not so much on remedies or the fabulous, but more on an anecdotal treatment of the natural world. For example, he maintains that male δρακοντες have crests and beards (XI, 26), situates monstrous δρακοντες in India and Ethiopia (XVI, 39), tells of the δρακων who can ascertain the virginity of girls placed blindfolded at its cavern door in Lavinia (XVI, 16), tells of a sacred δρακων kept in a tower who drives men insane on sight (XI, 17), relates Alexander's encounter with them (XV, 21)²⁰ and includes fable-like material on the δρακων falling in love with humans (VIII, 11 and VI, 17) and guarding them (VI, 63 and X, 48).

¹⁹ Ed. and trans. A. F. Scholfield, 3 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1958). Aelian's δρακων often signifies a large snake as it did in Pliny, but also present are strange accounts that seem to have influenced later conceptions of that word.

²⁰ This is especially interesting as a connection between the giant snakes in the Alexandrian travel accounts and the actual "dragon" conceived of later in the Middle Ages. The later travel accounts whose sources were more directly from the Greek and did not follow the repercussions of the encyclopedia definitions happening in the west, maintain the original wording. For this reason, we do not picture Alexander warding off dragons in his travels (cf. Wonders of the East, below, p. 117, and Kyng Alisaunder, below, p. 279).

Pliny, Solinus and Aelian were the major authorities for the definition of the dragon-as-animal in the beginning of the Middle Ages. Isidore of Seville, accepting most of Solinus' marvellous material, produced the commonly understood definition of the animal for ten centuries to come:

The dragon is greater than all serpents or any animal on earth. That which the Greeks call δράκοντα, from whence it is derived, in Latin is called draco. It often emerges from rocks and takes to the air; the air is stirred up because of it. Moreover, it is crested, with a small mouth and narrow tubes through which it draws breath and thrusts out its tongue. It has strength not in its teeth, but in its tail and harms more by lashing rather than with its jaw. Its venom is not necessarily lethal because it kills whatever it binds. From this not even the elephant with its huge body is safe for, hiding along the paths which an elephant is accustomed to tread, the dragon entwines its legs with knots, and suffocating, the elephant dies. Moreover, the dragon is bred in Ethiopia and India in the very glow of perennial heat.²¹

Isidore mentions draco the animal (not the weever fish) in only one other place in his work. He says that it eats

²¹ "Draco maior cunctorum serpentium, sive omnium animalium super terram. Hunc Graeci δράκοντα vocant; unde et derivatum est in Latinum ut draco diceretur. Qui saepe ab speluncis abstractus fertur in aerem, concitaturque propter eum aer. Est autem cristatus, ore parvo, et artis fistulis, per quas trahit spiritum et linguam exerat. Vim autem non in dentibus, sed in cauda habet, et verberare potius quam rictu nocet. Innoxius autem est a venenis, et ideo huic ad mortem faciendam, venena non esse necessaria, quia si quem ligarit occidit. A quo nec elephans tutus est sui corporis magnitudine; nam circa semitas delitescens, per quas elephanti soliti gradiuntur, crura eorum nodis inligat, ac suffocatos perimit. Gignitur autem in Aethiopia et India in ipso incendio iugis aestus." (Isidore, XII, iv, 4-5.)

young cows in water (XII, ii, 16). He accounts for other kinds of serpents (including the basilisk) but never refers to them as draco. Because Isidore had so much influence on bestiaries--the later pseudo-scientific medieval works which treat the dragon--it seems likely that he had much to do with stabilizing the meaning of the word. The following was now understood about the creature. It is

- 1) larger than all serpents or anything living on earth
- 2) lives in caves and is borne in the air
- 3) stirs up (burns?) air around it
- 4) crested, small mouth, narrow gullet
- 5) kills with tail not teeth
- 6) non-poisonous--suffocates victims
- 7) can kill elephants
- 8) lives in Ethiopia and India

The list shows the influence of Pliny, Solinus and Aelian. Many elaborations and variations are to come (notably the fish-like qualities), but Isidore has established the basic definition for the animal in the Middle Ages. Once again, this is a description of a living being, not a literary figure.

Beyond the encyclopedias, a second class of writings which deals with the dragon-as-animal and leads us more or less into the next category, the dragon-as-symbol, is the fable. Fables are peculiar in that they portray animals with human characteristics. The characters in the narrative, then, are already imbued with a certain amount of meaning. They represent something beyond what they appear to be. This representation is clarified in the moralitas section

of the fable. We are now one step away from the symbol.

More appropriate here is the term metaphor; "symbol" is reserved for metaphors repeated and extending beyond one work.

This classification may be misleading. The moralitas interprets the whole action of the fable, not just the individual characters. Thus, although in the tale an animal represents a certain type of human because of its action in the narrative, we would hardly say it was a symbol for that type of human. In the example of the Fox and the Dragon,²² a fox digging a hole comes upon a dragon guarding a treasure. The fox carefully approaches him and asks the dragon what profit he receives from his work, and the dragon replies that he receives none--it is the will of the Fates. The fox concludes that he must have been born under the displeasure of the gods to have such a life. The moral is that misers live lifetimes of blind folly and self-torment.

Here the dragon is associated with the miser. A history of this association is not assumed; it is laid out almost fresh at this point. The dragon in this instance is not yet a symbol, but a metaphor for the miser. All fables are compact metaphors to the extent that they present characters whose actions associate them with other characters of similar

²² In Aesopica, ed. and in part trans. Ben Edwin Perry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), Vol. I, no. 518.

actions. With animal fables, of course, the animal represents the human.

So far, the dragon is still used merely as an animal. By the nature of this particular literary form, an interpretation is put upon it. It operates as a fox, lion, eagle or wolf does in the fable. Its function, in this instance, is to exist simply as an animal who happens to have among its habits the tendency to guard buried treasure. There is nothing fabulous intended. The dragon is an animal just like the lion or wolf.²³

In this sense, I feel the fable can provide evidence in our understanding of the dragon-as-animal. Five extant fables involving dracones or δράκοντες can be found in Ben Edwin Perry's Aesopica. The Fox and the Dragon (#518) can be dated back to 25 A.D. It tells us that the dragon guards buried treasure. It also intimates the fox's fear of the creature.

A second fable, The Dragon and the Worm (or Lizard), dated c. 230 and extant in two Greek versions, one slightly longer, in prose (#268), the other shorter, in verse (#371), tells of a worm envying a δράκων's length. The worm, trying to stretch itself to that length, bursts apart. The moral

²³ Most animals in fables can talk. This is a feature of the genre; the moral is lost if the animal is construed out of the ordinary. For more on monsters in fables, see below, p. 78.

is, do not envy your superiors. This fable gives us little more than a reference to the δράκων's length. In this example, the writer may well have been referring to the great snake with which Pliny was familiar. The existence of the Fox and Dragon, however, makes us less eager to dismiss it. Also, in the shorter version, the protagonist is a σαύρος or lizard, that is, a four-footed reptile. Its emulation of a four-footed dragon rather than a legless serpent might be more likely.

The Eagle and the Dragon (c. 350 A.D.--#395) has a δράκων and eagle fighting, with the eagle trapped in the coils of the δράκων until a farmer set the eagle free, whereupon the δράκων secretly dropped poison in the cup of the farmer. As the farmer was about to drink, the eagle, seeing all, snatched the cup from the farmer's hand. The moral is that grateful people stand by their benefactors. The δράκων here possesses the coiling powers of the dragon, attested to later by Isidore, but the poison could indicate a rendering of "serpent."²⁴ Cunning is stressed, a characteristic of both creatures.²⁵

²⁴ Dragons are, however, in some accounts, poisonous. Note the plight of Tristan, infested by the creature's poison. Le roman de Tristan par Thomas, ed. Joseph Bédier, I (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1902), 117.

²⁵ For the cunning of the dragon, cf. Augustine, below, p. 163, and for a discussion on why the farmer helps the eagle, not the dragon, cf. Perceval's rescue of the lion, below, p. 270. See also Rudolf Wittkower, "Eagle and Serpent," Journal

Two more fables, traced only as far back as the thirteenth century, produce less questionable descriptions. In the Dragon and the Farmer (Peasant) (#640a) a dracho, stranded because the river he was travelling in receded, asks a farmer to bind him and carry him home on the back of his donkey in return for wealth and good fortune. Upon his doing so, the dragon says he will eat the farmer because he bound him too tightly. A passing fox was called in to judge. He tells the farmer to show him how tight he bound the dracho. Once the dracho was bound again the fox tells the farmer to take him back to the place he found him and leave him there bound and then the dracho will not eat him. The moral is that men who repay good with evil will get their just rewards. From this we learn that the dracho needs water for transport, promises wealth (treasure) and good fortune (cf. eastern dragon, p. 201), eats people (cf. saints' lives, p. 251), and is cunning but not as much so as the fox, who, as in the Dragon and the Fox, again proves the wiser.

The Dragon's Deposit (#663) relates how a draco and a man formed a friendship pact. The draco had a treasure which he entrusted to the man, and to test him, the draco told him to guard an egg which was essential to the draco's life and safety. The man, wanting his gold, broke the egg thinking

of the Warburg Institute, 2 (1938-39), for a history of this motif.

that the draco would then die. The draco returned and found just how trustworthy the friend was. The moral is that it is good to test your friends. In this story the draco again has a treasure, and establishes a pact with a human, indicating that he is not inherently hostile,⁸ which is reminiscent of some of Aelian's stories. He is once again cunning and in this example the protagonist of the fable. The egg may be associated with the oriental myth of one's life being kept in an egg or a reference to dragons being hatched from eggs.

Fables, then, describe the dragon-as-animal as a creature who may guard/own treasure (sometimes buried), inspire fear, be rather large, be cunning and poisonous, promise good fortune, need water for transport, and eat people. From these few examples we note a tendency toward patterns which extend beyond physical attributes. The dragon, like the serpent and the fox, is seen repeatedly as cunning. It is also in most instances hostile. It is not yet a symbol for cunning or hostility, but the repeated metaphor is establishing connotative qualities for the creature which are beginning to give the animal an ethical significance. In the encyclopedias and fables the dragon does not yet symbolize hostility but the rudiments for the subsequent symbolic use of the creature can be seen in them.

B. Symbol

Used symbolically, the dragon retains its animal nature and also suggests additional meanings. An argument could be made that the dragon can never stand alone as an animal, but, because of its mythological origins, must carry meanings which lie beneath the surface. This possibility must be examined in light of the rich mythological traditions discussed in a later chapter. At this juncture it is necessary to distinguish between the fabulous, the mythological and the symbolic. These three attributes of the dragon can be mutually exclusive. The first is most commonly found. The fabulous, of course, refers to physical characteristics beyond what we (in retrospect) deem natural. The mythological, in this medieval context, means that a particular work is drawing on past occurrences of the dragon in myth. The symbolic must remain primarily a literary/artistic term, clarifying the relationship of the dragon in a work to other elements of that work by imbuing the character of the dragon with a generally more abstract meaning, as is customary in the vehicle-tenor structure of symbols.

As we define it now, the dragon is a fabulous creature --a monster perhaps with wings or seven heads or the power to breathe fire. Throughout history the dragon was not always an unreal creature. As we have seen, it often resembled a large snake. Its physical attributes and strange customs

were often no more unbelievable than those of the hippopotamus. The dragon-as-animal most frequently had what we now consider fabulous attributes but this neither rendered it necessarily unbelievable nor symbolic.

Further, the creature very often appears to be imbedded in a mythological tradition (as opposed to the natural history tradition just examined). The word "dragon" in our time may necessarily evoke basic mythological connotations.²⁶ Specific mythologies, as we have seen with the fables, by repeated patterning may produce connotations or ethical significations. Ovid's dragons are both hostile and awesome.

Still, the dragon as a motif can be developed further. It can be made to represent an abstraction. The eastern mythological dragon often represents good fortune. The dragon in near-eastern mythology has represented chaos. The dragon in medieval Christian mythology very often represented the devil. It is clear from these three common examples that mythologies can create their own symbolic use of the

²⁶ See Martin Nilsson, "The Dragon on the Treasure," Opuscula selecta: linguis anglica, franco-gallica, germanica conscripta (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1960), III, 117. Nilsson maintains that Teutonic languages took over the word δράκων at the latest in the beginning of the Middle Ages because in German, the word had undergone the second Lautverschiebung by which 'k' was changed to 'ch'. This took place in the sixth or seventh centuries A.D., rendering the German Drache, but producing in Swedish (which did not partake in the change) drake. He further states that in Greek or Latin the word is used as both monster and snake, but in Teutonic languages it is only monster, thus showing that the word was taken over together with its accompanying fables.

dragon, thus combining both its mythological and symbolic attributes.

In the examination of the individual traditions, emphasis will be placed on the medieval Christian system which so greatly influenced English literature and art. The transition from dragon-as-animal to dragon-as-symbol can be most easily appreciated by observing how the Physiologus and subsequent bestiaries differed from the encyclopedic treatment of animals. A twelfth-century bestiary shows the standard entry of the dragon composed of the passage from Isidore quoted above followed by a comparison of the dragon to the devil:

The Devil, who is the most enormous of all reptiles, is like this dragon. He is often borne into the air from his cave, and the air shines through him, for the Devil, raising himself, from the beginning, translates himself into an angel of light and deceives the foolish with the hope of false glory and human happiness. He is said to have a crest because he is the king of pride and has his poison not in his teeth but in his tongue because he beguiles those whom he draws to him by deceit, their strength destroyed. He lies hidden round the paths on which elephants tread, because the devil always follows great men. He entangles their legs with knots of his tail, and if he is able, ensnares them, and because their way to heaven is encumbered by the knots of their sins, he strangles them to death. For anybody ensnared by the chain of crimes dies, and no doubt he is damned in hell.²⁷

²⁷ "Huic draconi assimilatur diabolus, qui est immanissimus serpens. Saepe in aerem a spelunca sua concitatur, et lucet per eum aer, quia diabolus ab initio se erigens transfigurat se in angelum lucis, et decipit stultos spe falsae gloriae, laetitiaeque humanae. Cristatus esse dicitur, quia

Manoeuvring the material in this way and creating symbolic meanings was a long process begun centuries before the twelfth. The Vulgate itself and its accompanying exegesis played a part in the tradition. The English saints' lives and romances were very much affected by the medieval taste for the symbolic, and the dragons used in these works will be evaluated in this light.

C.. Sign

There is one more interpretive level. Can we justly classify the dragon in Arthur's dream in Malory with the dragon in Beowulf? Both have some symbolic element. Besides the disparity in length of treatment, are not the dragons used in radically different ways? The comparison is very much akin to that of a dragon on a coat of arms judged side by side with a manuscript illumination of the Apocalyptic dragon.

When a symbol is pressed to the extent that the vehicle

ipse est rex superbiae. Venenum non in dentibus, sed in lingua habet, quia suis viribus [juribus] perditis, mendacio decipit, quos ad se trahit. Circa semitas, per quas elephantes gradiuntur, delitescit, quia diabolus semper magnificos viros insequitur. Crura eorum caudae nodis illigat, et si potest illaqueat, quia iter eorum ad coelum nodis peccatorum, illaqueat, ac suffocando perimit, quia quisquis vinculo criminum irretitus moritur, sine dubio in infernum damnatur." Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor, De bestiis et aliis rebus, in P.L. 177:72.

has no real existence on its own and the tenor is all that remains; the symbol becomes a sign.²⁸ The dragon then becomes shorthand for the abstraction. In the example drawn from heraldry, the meaning is clear. The dragon exists only to portray an attribute--generally power. The dragon in the Apocalyptic illustration, on the other hand, exists as a monster that has a defined role in the narrative of the scene. It is clearly symbolic of the devil, but maintains its identity as monster, which is essential to the effectiveness of the scene.

The dragon portent in Malory is a supreme example. It exists as a device not a character. The portent is often called a "sign" for just these reasons. It points to only one thing. It has no purpose unto itself, nor rays of meanings that symbols possess. Portents, however, are an extreme and straightforward example of signs. The seemingly perfunctory scenes of knights battling dragons should be examined. In some instances they provide a substantial addition to the narrative and characterization not only of the knight, but also of the dragon itself. At other times, however, especially when the passage is short, the conquered dragon is reduced to a sign of the knight's prowess.

²⁸ For a comprehensive treatment of these distinctions see Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

The same can be seen in saints' lives. Conquest of a dragon was an element added later to many saints' legends. Sometimes the author/artist is genuinely interested in exploring the symbolic possibilities of the dragon scene, and at other times the dragon is present as an emblem of the saint's conquest of the devil--often hearkening back to the prototype of St. Michael.²⁹

A note must be added in defence and clarification of this imposed system of interpretation. Important scholarly activity recently has come to light in the area of medieval symbolization, not the least of which is Peter Dronke's careful study of fabula. Yet Dronke, with all his attempts to define symbol in terms of imago, similitudo, integumentum, and involucrum points out that there is no "consistent, unambiguously 'medieval' use of symbolic modes."³⁰ The boundaries, both in time and geography, prohibit the use of

²⁹ Many saints' lives were also heavily influenced by the St. George legend (see below, p. 253).

³⁰ Peter Dronke, Fabula (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 67. One of the most pertinent aspects of this book is Dronke's analysis of the medieval necessity to treat the objectionable in fabulae as symbol, which is traced in Benjamin P. Kurtz's Studies in the Marvellous (Berkeley: University Press, 1910): "... Greek intelligence, proving itself not very different from that of a modern apologist, found, of course, a ready compromise in allegorical interpretation" (p. 16). This became a compromise not only for the morally objectionable, but for the scientifically objectionable marvels.

a specific rhetorical system in this study of the dragon.

Still, the complexity of individual definitions of these terms underlines the necessity to distinguish the possible level of interpretation for each work at hand. Animal, symbol and sign are the most basic considerations in dealing with the medieval monster. They are the twentieth-century reader's first step in the sophisticated field of medieval symbolization. They represent, respectively, no additional meaning, many additional meanings (varying), and one or two additional meanings (fixed). The categorization supplants no rhetorical system of the time but is the very fundamental consideration which must be made before attempting investigations into precise distinctions, possibly supported by a treatise employing one or all of the above terms. Although tempting, this kind of inquiry is beyond the scope of this work.

Artistic Representations

The problem of the monster in medieval literature has remained, for the most part, uninvestigated and, therefore, unresolved by scholars. Monsters appeared in many works but were leading figures in few major ones. Monsters in medieval art, however, have not been so generally overlooked.³¹ It

³¹ See Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century, trans. Dora Nussey, 3rd ed. (France, 1913; rpt. New York: Harper, 1958); Meyer Schapiro,

is difficult to view a substantial amount of sculpture or paintings, especially Romanesque church ornament, without encountering, if not well-defined, recognizable creatures, then a number of peering misshapen fauna. The purpose of these monsters has proven a matter of controversy for art historians.

Their discussion can be summarized in a way which echoes the problem literary historians have with similar beasts. Reducing the possibilities to two options, Mâle in The Gothic Image sees animals as representational (usually symbolic), or, alternately, as purely decorative.³² The rare symbolic animals, Mâle demonstrates, are ones such as we find on the trumeau of the central doorway of Amiens at the feet of the statue of Christ (figure 3).³³ Here the lion, dragon,

"On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art," in Art and Thought, ed. K. B. Iyer (London: Luzac, 1947), pp. 130-50; Heinz Mode, Fabeltiere und Dämonen in der Kunst: Die fantastische Welt der Mischwesen (Berlin: W. Kohlhammer, 1973), and Lascault.

³² Concluding an important chapter delineating specific examples of the thirteenth-century religious use of nature in art, Mâle writes: "At times the theologians imposed their conception on the world of art, and a small number of dogmatic works was executed under their direction, works in which each animal has the value of a symbol. But such works are rare, and for the most part the sculptors peopled the churches at will with plants and animals chosen for purely decorative reasons, but with a confused idea that the cathedral is an epitome of the world and so a place in which all God's creatures may find a home." (Mâle, p. 63.)

³³ Mâle, p. 44. Figure 3 is from this work.

basilisk and adder represent, according to Honorius Augustodunensis,³⁴ the Antichrist, devil, death and sin respectively. For an example of purely decorative animals, Mâle turns to the birds, monsters and men cavorting on the church door at Souillac (Lot) which he attributes simply to an imitation of Anglo-Saxon manuscript miniature designs.³⁵

Granted, Mâle is dealing with specifically French religious art of the thirteenth century and cannot be expected to develop categories which will encompass all the works used in this motif study. We will, of necessity, expand his symbolic category to include many representational works involving monsters, adding the secular illustrations of maps, encyclopedias and travel accounts as we find in a thirteenth-century Solinus manuscript (figure 4),³⁶ pertinent religious miniatures such as in an Apocalyptic dragon scene (figure 5)³⁷ as well as fifteenth-century fable woodcuts (figure 6).³⁸

³⁴ Mâle maintains (pp. 39-46) that information concerning symbolic animals was seldom drawn directly from bestiaries, but can be traced through Honorius Augustodunensis' Speculum Ecclesiae (in Migne, P.L., Vol. 172, cols. 913-16). These four animals are mentioned in Ps. 90(91):13. For contradictory exegeses of the passage, see below, p. 163.

³⁵ Mâle, pp. 50-1.

³⁶ See Wittkower, Allegory, p. 51, for a discussion of this work, and specifically the page shown in figure 4.

³⁷ For example, see figure 5 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection.

³⁸ Figure 6 is from a Latin and Italian edition of Aesop. See Aesopus: Vita et Fabulae Latine et Italice per Franc. de

Yet, even with modifications such as these, the representation/decoration dichotomy still exists as the fundamental consideration in evaluating a medieval artistic portrayal of animal. If a work is classified as the former, the problem is then to determine--perhaps from some soon-to-be-unearthed authoritative text--what these monsters might mean in their strange contexts. If classified as the latter, the analysis lies on aesthetic, not interpretive, grounds.

But why does all this affect a study of the dragon in medieval English literature? Simply because in pursuing the reason behind the preponderance of the monstrous in the plastic arts, we come one step closer to understanding the general artistic utilization of this subject. Further, if we retain the two alternatives proffered by art scholars, we could easily find the artistic monster falling into the categories outlined above. Thus, as representational, a monster can simply represent an animal. For instance, it clearly is in the various illustrations of encyclopedias and travel accounts or in the popular, embellished world maps.³⁹ Similarly, as representational, the monster in art can represent an animal, but also analogous beings or conceptions--i.e., it is a symbol. The Apocalyptic picture cycles, as

Tuppo, M.CCCC.lxxxv, a cura di Carlo de Frede (Associazione Napoletana, 1968), p. 214. This illustration is discussed below, p. 134.

³⁹ See below, pp. 131-34.

well as the later bestiary illustrations, depict these symbolic monsters.⁴⁰ Finally, a monstrous creature can be used to represent one very definite idea. Its animality has virtually disappeared--i.e., it becomes a sign. The monsters of heraldry are vivid examples of this.⁴¹

Each interpretive level, then, has corresponding artistic monsters which operate in ways similar to the literary ones. Sometimes this is exhibited in a text and accompanying illustrations, as in the bestiaries. Here both the textual monster and the artistic one demand a symbolic meaning. At other times the connections, although more tenuous, can still, with some thought, be discerned. Encyclopedia entries, clearly on an animal level, are most appropriately paired with the monsters represented on world maps. In this way, the methodology prescribed for the organization and interpretation of textual monsters can be seen to do the same service for artistic ones.

Unfortunately, all these representational monsters, neatly understandable, form an array which is not at all comprehensive. The famous letter of Bernard of Clairvaux asks "to what purpose" is this "comely deformity?"⁴² thereby

⁴⁰ See below, pp. 170-74.

⁴¹ See below, pp. 107-12.

⁴² "Caeterum in claustris coram legentibus fratribus quid facit illa ridicula monstruositas, mira quaedam deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas? Quid ibi immundae simiae? quid feri leones? quid monstruosi centauri? quid semihomines? quid maculosae tigrides? quid milites pugnantes? quid venatores tubicinantes? Videas sub uno capite multa corpora, et

indicating an educated twelfth-century cleric's befuddlement and the small probability that all artistic monsters of his day were systematized religious symbols or simple animal illustrations.

The alternative, Mâle's theory that these monsters are purely decorative, has its own inadequacies. If we accept that these Romanesque grotesques are decoration, can we stop there? Do we not then have to ask what makes the medieval conception of decoration take this bizarre turn?

In a slightly different approach, Meyer Schapiro, in an article devoted to the emergence of secular artistic creation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, writes:

Are the religious and the ornamental the only alternatives of artistic purpose? Apart from the elements of folklore and popular belief in some of these fantastic types, they are a world of projected emotions, psychologically significant images of force, play, aggressiveness, anxiety, self-torment and fear, embodied in the powerful forms of instinct-driven creatures, twisted, struggling, entangled, confronted and superposed.⁴³

rursus in uno corpore capita multa. Cernitur hinc in quadrupede cauda serpentis, illinc in pisce caput quadrupedis. Ibi bestia praefert equum, capram trahens retro dimidiam; hic cornutum animal equum gestat posterius. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas apparet, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando. Proh Deo! Si non pudet ineptiarum, cur vel non piget expensarum?" ("Apologia" of St. Bernard of Clairvaux to William, abbot of St.-Thierry, in Migne, P.L., 182:914-16.)

⁴³ Schapiro, p. 137.

Decoration and ornament are perhaps far too limiting labels for these non-representational creatures. The terms connote a certain amount of extraneous and valueless material, an end to inquiry, a loophole for critics stumped by the aesthetics of bygone eras.⁴⁴ Since no answer has been found to the question of these nameless grotesque figures, this study will rely on the monsters of art known to be representational. Yet, if these unidentified grotesques--mysterious in purpose--cannot be conveniently inserted into an interpretive system, can we not learn from them something about those monsters which can be categorized and are less obscure in meaning?

In looking once again at St. Bernard's complaint, we find the revealing lines, "In short, so many and so marvellous are the varieties of diverse shapes on every hand, that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books, and to

⁴⁴ In comparing classical plant ornament and northern animal ornament, Worringer comes close to confronting this issue in this rather controversial statement: "that these designs [northern zoomorphs] were based on recollections not of any definite species, but of animals in general is proved by the fact that motives from widely different animals were thoughtlessly combined. It was only later naturalization that made these shapes develop into those well-known fabulous monsters which were adopted in later ornament. . . . Originally, these shapes were merely the offshoots of a linear fantasy; apart from this linear fantasy they have no existence, not even in the imaginative life of Northern man." Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (München: R. Piper, 1912; rpt. with auth. trans., ed. with introd. by Sir Herbert Read, London: Alec Tiranti, 1957), p. 60.

spend the whole day in wondering at these things rather than in meditating the law of God." Schapiro astutely points out that Bernard is clearly attracted to the very objects he so soundly condemns, and attributes the attraction to the power of an emerging secular artistic creativity.⁴⁵ Can we not take this a little further and maintain that Bernard was drawn not just to this artistic spontaneity but to the very nature of the monstrous, as was the artist himself? Clearly, St. Bernard's distraction from monastic contemplation is a tribute to the efficacy of the artist's work.

Note the phrase "read in the marble" (legere in marmorbis). Monsters were not just one of many possible motifs used in artistic expression and symbolization in his day, they were one of the foremost. Their power was attested "on every hand"; yet today, for reasons other than Bernard's, we have become blinded to it. One begins to suspect that the problem might lie in our own crippling realism; the remedy would begin by surrounding ourselves with these creatures as medieval artists did in both literary and plastic arts. And then, as Bernard undoubtedly caught himself doing, we might sit back and "read in the marble."

⁴⁵ Schapiro, pp. 135-7. For Bernard, see above, n. 42.

II

THE MONSTER IN THE MIDDLE AGES

A. Introduction

The medieval dragon evolved out of several rich traditions, bridging different cultures and religions. The development of its particular history will be traced in the next chapter. Before reaching back into the oftentimes speculative mythologies of ancient peoples, however, I must first establish the relationship of the dragon to the complicated and popular phenomenon of the medieval monster. It would be a mistake to imagine the dragon as a unique or whimsical creation among medieval writers and artists. On the contrary, the medieval love of monster lore is a supportive and in some ways generative agent for the popularity of the dragon in the Middle Ages.

For example, the innovation of the dragon as a separate entry into the bestiaries greatly heightened its notoriety and helped to develop its symbolic meanings. Without the existing monster tradition in the bestiary, the dragon would not have been so readily accepted.¹ Despite their apparent

¹ The dragon appeared in the earliest versions in the panther, elephant and peredixion tree sections. Later versions gave it an entry of its own. See below, p. 138.

unconcern for verity, medieval accounts of animals were very strictly controlled by "authoritative" writings. Even eye-witness accounts did not become standard until later. The hydra, mythical opponent of Hercules, was clearly distinguished by careful writers from the hydrus, the water snake known for its battles with the crocodile. The hydra story is often labeled "fabulosum."²

Thus, truly to appreciate the dragon's position in these centuries, one must consider how the Middle Ages handled other beings similar to it. The story of the medieval monster tradition is a long and as yet, confusing one. Fortunately, monsters in literature and art can be seen to adhere to the distinctions made about dragons in the preceding chapter.

The first problem, as with the dragon, is to establish a working definition of "monster." In this situation, however, we need not labour to determine the medieval circumference of the word. For our purposes here, a retrospective definition is entirely useful. Monsters, simply, can be the beings which, because of their attributes, we assume do not exist and never have. This should provide a wide

² This is standard; see, for example, Isidore, XII, iv, 22, the Liber monstrorum, in Moritz Haupt, "Index Lectionum Aestivarum 1863," in Opuscula, II (Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1876; rpt. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1967), 218-52, hydra, p. 246(3), hydrus, p. 251(21); and Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor, De bestiis et aliis rebus, in Migne, P.L., 177:60 (Bk. II, 7).

enough comparative background within which to place the dragon. This definition, notably, involves no aesthetic or ethical judgment. The phoenix and unicorn are not excluded.

Next, we can establish a distinction between human-like and animal-like monsters, with giants and sciapods³ falling into the first category (which, for convenience, will be referred to as marvels or marvellous races), and creatures such as griffins and basilisks (referred to as monsters proper) falling into the second. Immediately the problem arises with those beings with both human and animal attributes such as the harpy, cynocephalus and mantichore. These will fall into one of the above groups depending on their particular literary tradition. For example, the cynocephalus is characteristically listed among the marvellous races and is therefore more in the marvel category than the monster. The mantichore, found mostly in bestiaries, not travel accounts, should be classified as monster. Finally, the harpy, a throw-back to classical mythology,⁴ although mentioned by Ariosto as persecuting Prester John in his eastern kingdom by eating all his food as a punishment for pride, is also in Vincent

³ See Appendix 1 for descriptions and references to monsters discussed in this chapter. For giants and sciapods (sciopodes), see marvellous races.

⁴ Vergil, Aeneid, III, 212-18.

of Beauvais' Speculum naturale⁵ and should be classified as a monster.

The distinctions between these two categories become clearer and more meaningful as the travel and bestiary traditions are differentiated. Since this study is being used to illuminate the dragon's place in thought and art of the Middle Ages, it necessarily will have more detailed information on monsters proper. The history of marvels, nevertheless, intertwines with that of monstrous animals, and the eastern marvels can be seen to influence popular conceptions of the whole natural world.

Interestingly, monstrum in the Middle Ages often meant the human-like beings,⁶ and later, toward the end of these centuries, the word seemed especially to signify "freak" or individual monstrous birth as it is used in Edward Topsell's The Historie of Fovre-Footed Beastes.⁷ Perhaps folklore and poor lines of communication made the Middle Ages more readily amenable to animal monsters (the elephant or giraffe as well as the dragon or hydra) rather than to the more theologically

⁵ Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. John Harington (1591), ed. Robert McNulty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), Bk. 33, stanza 111; and Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum naturale (Austria: Akademische Druck, 1964), Bk. 16, ch. 94.

⁶ See Isidore, Bk. XI.

⁷ (London: E. Cotes, 1658).

threatening notion of human monsters, which at one time included pygmies and all black men in the same lists as races with ears like fans or eyes in their chests.

With this somewhat loose definition of the categories of creatures to be considered, one can see that writers and artists have used them in basically the three ways discussed in the previous chapter. Monsters (marvels) appear as animals (races), symbols and signs. Reviewing their occurrences chronologically, within each interpretive level, will yield the proper context for the more comprehensive examination of one of their number, the dragon.

B. Monsters as Animals

Medieval monsters were often considered exotic breeds found in far-off lands. Because of the relative advancement in scientific inquiry and the relative isolation of what we now call medieval Europe, the belief in such animals and races thrived for centuries. Of course, not all the monsters which this chapter treats were whole-heartedly accepted, but the majority could not be refuted. Indeed, on reflection, one can appreciate the educated man's dilemma in those centuries. Many animals which he learned to believe in he never had the benefit of actually seeing himself. The elephant, known through written accounts, representations in art and word of mouth only, commanded no more faith than the

basilisk. Repeated and consistent reports from authoritative quarters ingrained the belief into many an educated person.

A fine illustration of this process is Augustine's discussion of the marvels in his City of God.⁸ Questioning whether certain monstrous races are derived from the stock of Adam or Noah's sons, he mentions races with one eye in the middle of their forehead, or feet turned backward, or with double sex, or with no mouth, or pygmies only one cubit high, or women who conceive in their fifth year and die in the eighth, or with no head and eyes in their shoulders, or skiopodes, or cynocephali. His arguments are logical. Either (1) they do not exist, (2) they are not human or (3) if human, they derive from Adam.

In the next chapter, he discusses the possibility of the existence of the Antipodes who live on the opposite side of the earth and have their feet on backward. He concludes that they are not to be believed in because even if we were to believe that the earth is round, how do we know that the other side is not just water, or if land, peopled? Secondly, Scripture does not tell us about these people, nor is it probable that some men traversed the wide ocean and their descendants remain there still. (Note that his reasoning is applied to the location of the race, not their peculiar foot

⁸ Augustine, De civitate dei, in Migne, P.L., 41:485-7 (Bk. 16, ch. 8).

structure.)

As becomes clear, St. Augustine, although sceptical, knew that a man born into a world with many as yet unexplored frontiers could not afford to doubt the existence of animals or even races of men just because he had not seen them himself. It was a difficult position.

A similar example is Ratramnus of Corbie's Epistola de cynocephalis ad Rimbertyum Presbyterum scripta (c. 850).⁹

The existence of cynocephali was particularly difficult to debunk as it was thought at that time that St. Christopher himself had a dog's head: "he had the head of a hound, and his locks were long, and his eyes shone as brightly as the morning star, and his teeth were as sharp as the tusks of boars."¹⁰ Still Ratramnus proceeds cautiously, maintaining that if they are human, they are descended from the first man (as Augustine showed). He states that there were many races in the time of Alexander which were half man, half animal and he will not judge those. Rimbertyus sent him additional information, namely that although the cynocephali

⁹ In Migne, P.L., 121:1153-6.

¹⁰ "... he hæfde hundes heafod, and his loccas wæron ofer gemet side, and his eagan scinon swa lechte swa morgensteorra, and his teð wæron swa scearpe swa eofores tuxas"--An Old English Martyrology, re-ed. George Herzfeld, EETS, vol. 116 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), p. 66. By the time of the South English Legendary (c. 1300), ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 2 vols. EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), St. Christopher was merely a giant, 24 feet high, pp. 340ff.

cannot talk and seem to have no rational mind, nevertheless they do cultivate land, wear clothes, make laws and domesticate animals. From this he concludes that the cynocephali must be sentient, and therefore have souls.

Thus, theologians were concerned with the marvels because they could possibly have souls.¹¹ Less pressure was put on the credibility of animal monsters. In addition, the problem was not always a straightforward one. Many animals written about in the Middle Ages very definitely existed and the accounts are factual except for perhaps one particular element. The panther, for example, after it has dined is said to hide away in its den and sleep for three days. At which time it awakes and emits a great belch and a very sweet smell comes from its mouth. When all the other animals hear its voice, they follow it wherever it goes because of the sweetness of the breath, except for the dragon, who hides in fear, motionless.¹² Through written and oral tradition, many non-monstrous animals are imbued with completely unsubstantiated attributes or habits. This tendency cannot be examined here, but should not be forgotten. The strange

¹¹ For the history of the marvellous races, see Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 5 (1942), 159-97.

¹² Francis J. Carmody, Physiologus latinus (versio B) (Paris: E. Droz, 1939), p. 40. The Physiologus was the forerunner of the medieval bestiary. See below, p. 80.

monsters encountered in these writings will be less surprising if the fabulous natures of many otherwise ordinary animals is kept in mind.

Further, with a number of monsters (notably the griffin, hydrus, chimera, sphinx and satyr) there was a consistent tradition of doubt or confusion of identity. The griffin was said by some to be merely a large eagle,¹³ the hydrus an ordinary water snake. The chimera, part lion, goat and dragon, interestingly, was thought to be a poetic method of describing the levels of a mountain. Isidore writes: "The Physiologi say that it is not an animal, but a mountain of Cilicia, nourishing lions and goats in certain areas, burning in others and filled with serpents in others."¹⁴ Early renditions of the sphinx and satyr became modified to non-fabulous types of African apes, with specific traits reminiscent of these monsters.¹⁵

¹³ Contrast Mandeville's account verifying the half eagle, half lion description: Mandeville's Travels, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), ch. 29, p. 194, and Marco Polo's account insisting that it is just an extremely large bird: The Travels of Marco Polo, by L. Foscolo Benedetto, trans. Aldo Ricci (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931), p. 343. Also cf. Wittkower, "'Roc': An Eastern Prodigy in a Dutch Engraving," Journal of the Warburg Institute, 1 (1937-38), for the mythical bird who carries away elephants and men, much like the griffin.

¹⁴ "Quam quidam Physiologi non animal, sed Ciliciae montem esse aiunt, quibus locis leones et capreas nutrientem, quibusdam ardentem, quibusdam plenum serpentibus," (Isidore, XI, 36).

¹⁵ Aelian, XVI, 21, and Solinus, 128:9. See also Augustine, Bk. 16, ch. 8, where he states that some historians call

One of the most persistent occurrences of this sort was that of the unicorn. Called by Latin writers monosceros, rhinoceros and unicornis, the distinction was infrequently made between the fierce plated animal we call rhinoceros today and the gentle horse-like beast captured only by a virgin. The term unicornis became so widespread in the genre of animal works that Solinus' fierce enemy of the elephant (monosceros) was rendered "unicorn" in the sixteenth-century translation of his work by Englishman Arthur Golding.¹⁶ Ambiguous references in the Bible only perpetuated the confusion.¹⁷

Notwithstanding these difficulties, we can still examine a number of medieval monsters and note how they were either simply described, or used as symbols and signs. Just as the dragon-as-animal can be found in natural science encyclopedias so can the monster-as-animal. With the broader category of monsters, however, the investigation reaches further back into the accounts of journeys to the East.

On the chart on the next page, note that travel accounts, encyclopedias and bestiaries are distinguished from one

apes, monkeys and sphinxes men, but we know better.

¹⁶ The Excellent and Pleasant Worke of Caius Julius Solinus, facs. by George Kish (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facs. Reprints, 1955), ch. 64.

¹⁷ See monsters as symbols, below, p. 74.

Medieval Monster Traditions

Travel

Herodotus 5th C.
Ktesias 398
Megasthenes 303

(A.D.)

Lucan 62

Encyclopedia

Pliny 79

Solinus 218
Aelian 220

(Augustine c. 400)
Letter of Firmus
Mirabilia 4th-9th

Ratramnus of C. c. 868
Wonders of East
Letter of Alex 9th

Isidore 630

Liber Monst. 7th-9th
Hrabanus Maurus c. 856

Honorius 1156
Neckam 1180

Thomas de Cant. c. 1248
Albertus Magnus c. 1250
Barth. Ang. 1260
Vincent of B. 1264
Brunetto Lat 1266

Marco Polo 1295
Odoric 1330
Mandeville 1397

Bestiary

Greek Physiologus c. 130

Ambrose 386
Latin Phys. ?
Chrysostomus 5th
OE Phys. ?

Theobaldus 11th-12th
Philippe 1121
Pseudo-Hugh 12th
Anon. 12th

Gervaise 1200
Guillaume 1211
Pierre de B 1217

Richard de F 13th

Thomas Browne 1646

another. Many bestiary entries on monsters will be identical to encyclopedia ones, excluding those that have an interpretation following the description. Further, some encyclopedias include short standard interpretations, especially when Bible exegesis is involved. Nevertheless, a clear understanding of the author's purpose will aid in determining the use of the monster in each particular work. Generally, we can say that travel accounts and encyclopedias render the most data on the monster as animal.

Ancient Travel Accounts

Traditionally, monster references in western culture begin with Herodotus' History¹⁸ in the fifth century B.C. This was the initial occurrence of what develops into centuries of literature professing the existence of marvellous creatures--especially marvellous races of men--in the ill-defined area of the East.¹⁹ An account written in Ionian, its purpose, fundamentally, was to relate the history of the Graeco-Persian war. In doing so, Herodotus had to establish

¹⁸ Ed. with trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1946).

¹⁹ The East often was no further than the Near East, and, as more explorations revealed discrepancies in these monster reports, the "East" (usually Libya or India) shifted to "Africa" (especially Ethiopia) and the traditions continued undaunted. For a short history of the problem, see Wittkower, "Marvels," n. 13.

the geography of the regions discussed, thus introducing strange animals and races if need be. He mentions the phoenix, winged snakes, griffins, giant ants, cynocephali, the one-eyed race called Arimaspians and the race of people with no heads and eyes in their chests.²⁰ With these four monsters and three marvels we have the beginning of the long tradition. All references are relatively short. The phoenix has its standard description,²¹ the winged serpents are outstanding in their plenitude and habit of guarding spice trees. The griffins are not described, but are repeatedly mentioned as hoarding gold which the one-eyed Arimaspians steal. The giant ants, almost the size of dogs (in later works sometimes called dog-ants) likewise hoard gold which they dig up from the sand. This time the method of capture is elaborated upon. Daring men harness camels, two male, one female (recently taken from her young), set out and, snatching up the gold, race back, loosing the male camels to occupy the ants, while the females, eager to return to their young, never tire on the return trip. The cynocephali

²⁰ See Appendix 2 for lists of monsters in individual works, and Appendix 1 for specific references.

²¹ The phoenix was, as will become apparent, a favourite among these writers and customarily demanded a rather detailed description of birth, resurrection and migration. There are interesting versions of its habits, but space does not permit a digression of this sort. Compare the versions referred to in Appendix 1.

and the race with eyes in their chests are merely mentioned.

Chronologically, the second important authority is Ktesias (c. 398 B.C.),²² who, gathering information from past writers, adds to the slowly expanding array of marvels. Author of the Indika, extant only in fragments, Ktesias is the first Greek to write a special treatise on that region. He was for seventeen years physician to the Persian royal court under Darius II and Artaxerxes Mnemon (and according to Xenophon took the field against Cyrus). McCrindle writes that he was praised for style and known for mendacity, but his fabulous races are found

so far from being fictions of his own invention, to have their exact analogues in monstrous races which are mentioned in the two great national epics and other Brahmanical writings, and which, though therein depicted with every attribute of deformity, were nevertheless, not purely fictitious, but misrepresentations of such aboriginal tribes as offered a stout resistance to their Aryan invaders while still engaged in the task of conquering India.²³

Whatever the source of his material, Ktesias added considerably to the list of marvels as well as discussing the martikhora (mantichore), a giant worm and a unicorn-like animal with a medicinal horn (standard for unicorns). His

²² See J. M. McCrindle, Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Knidian (London: Trübner, 1882; rpt. with add. from Indian Antiquary, 1881).

²³ Ibid., p. 5.

marvels include pygmies, cynocephali,²⁴ men who drink only milk, a race with eight fingers and toes, another with large ears, giants, men with tails, one-legged men, sciopodae, and a race with eyes in their shoulders.

Megasthenes, whose work, the lost *Tὰ Ἰνδικὰ*, is dated around 302-288 B.C., is the third great ancient travel authority. He was originally thought to have accompanied Alexander in his eastern campaigns, but it later became clear that his work is based on his experiences as ambassador to the Indian king Chandragupta.²⁵ Sent by Seleucus (the successor of Alexander as ruler of Persia), Megasthenes, nevertheless, marks the beginning of the Alexandrian travel tradition. Most of his fragments are straightforward and include comparatively few fantastic elements. However, all aspects of his report went unchallenged for 1500 years and comprised the western conception of that region. Examination of his fragments²⁶ (found mostly in Pliny, Strabo and Arrian)

²⁴ Lassen, whose 1874 review of Ktesias' reports is incorporated in McCrindle's book, expends much energy associating the marvellous races with real tribes, maintaining that the Cynocephali (Kynamolgoi or Kynokephaloi) were so called merely because they kept big dogs for hunting (see *ibid.*, p. 85). Another theory is that they are so named due to a dog-shaped head ornament.

²⁵ Wittkower, "Marvels," pp. 159ff.

²⁶ E. A. Schwanbeck, ed., *Megasthenes Indica: Fragmenta collegit* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1966). See also J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Calcutta: Chatterjee, 1926; rpt. from *Indian Antiquary*, 1876-77) for translation.

shows a greatly expanded list of marvels (see Appendix 2). He continues the tradition of winged serpents and giant ants (cf. Herodotus--although their descriptions are not the same) and a unicorn-like animal (cf. Ktesias). Further, he describes a mermaid, not so named, and assigns it bristles instead of hair (which is a rather important mermaid attribute in later accounts, as she is often seen holding a mirror and combing her locks).²⁷ Satyr-like animals²⁸ occur in a few fragments, included once in a list of sea monsters. Although of doubtful authorship, fragment 12B, describing the sea satyr and mermaid-type creature, does indicate very ancient consideration of such creatures.

Thus, by the first century A.D. the list of monsters

²⁷ Cf. The Mermaid, in The Celtic Dragon Myth, collected J. F. Campbell, trans. George Henderson (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911).

²⁸ For satyrs and other wild men, see Richard Bernheimer, Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952). Cf. the fable, the Man and the Satyr (Perry, #35) (c. 25 A.D.). A man, friends with a satyr, arrives at its house one winter. Being cold, the man blows on his hands to warm them and later blows on his food to cool it. The satyr refuses to continue the friendship because he distrusts a creature from whose mouth comes both hot and cold. The moral--we should flee from the friendship of those to whom a single condition has two meanings. The fable, adding little to our understanding of the creature, is interesting in the development of *σάτυρος*, the monster, as the forerunner of the sceptical or satyric character of men. Cf. also the etymology from "saturantur" referring to their insatiable lust, Georg Heinrich Bode, ed., Scriptores rerum mythicarum Latini (Germany: Celle, 1834; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), III, 14.5.

occurring as animals in texts was not impressive. Of course, monsters of countless sorts appeared in the various mythologies which western civilization generated. The Middle Ages will see a blending of the breeds of monsters traced in this section with the more individualized mythological monsters from classical times. Although these monsters are thriving through this period in their own genres of literature and art, they are not as yet permeating these accounts, and as will become more apparent, a certain categorization of monsters seems to take place. Most authors quite clearly distinguish between the "real" monsters and the fabulosa ones.

Lucan, who in his Pharsalia depicted the winged dragons besetting Cato on his voyage through Libya,²⁹ likewise mentions the dangerous two-headed amphisbaena and the kingly basilisk "ante venena nocens"³⁰ referring to its deadly look (or breath). Lucan limits his eastern monsters to these three of the serpent family. With this peculiar selection of creatures, we turn to the encyclopedists.

²⁹ Dragons were consistently found in Libya. Cf. the Life of St. George, below, p. 253.

³⁰ Lucan, ix, 725.

Encyclopedias and Medieval Travel Accounts (Early)

The three standard classical encyclopedias on animals were those of Pliny, Solinus and Aelian. The monsters which they treat (see Appendices 2 and 3) form a considerable array of creatures which become the bestiary favourites. In addition, they all treat marvels to a greater or lesser degree. (Aelian was not as concerned with them as Pliny or Solinus.)

The selection of monsters is quite similar, with Solinus characteristically finding slightly more fabulous elements to talk about. These lists can only be an approximation of the monster and monster-related material in the lengthy volumes. (They are meant to show the classical origins of later medieval trends. Important to note at this time are the recurring monsters which will eventually become a "core" for the seemingly uncontrolled presentation of monster breeds in subsequent literature and art. The amphisbaena, basilisk and dragon trio again appears.³¹ The phoenix, griffin, giant

³¹ The cockatrice was often an alternative name for basilisk. Basilisk (Latin regulus) derives its name from a crown-like protuberance on its head and is king of the smaller reptiles, where the dragon is king of the larger. The cockatrice was so called because, born from a yokeless egg laid by a rooster, it possessed a body more like a cock than the reptilian basilisk. According to some, the cockatrice with two heads at opposite ends of the body is the amphisbaena (or amphisbaena). Attributes of all three become interchanged, although the term cockatrice (thought to be confused with "crocodile") did not occur as often. See Peter Lum, Fabulous Beasts (New York: Pantheon, 1951), pp. 38-42. Much

ants, mantichore, satyr and unicorn treated in the earlier travel accounts are present along with interesting additions such as the catoblepas, tarrande, leucocrote and bonasus.

Two more encyclopedic works³² should be considered at this point before comparing the contemporary developments in travel literature. Isidore's highly influential Etymologiae organizes monster material in a significant way. He discusses monstrous portents,³³ that is, the monstrous races and individual mythological monsters in Bk. XI, reserving Bk. XII for animals such as the amphisbaena, basilisk, dragon, hydra (but calling it fable), grypes (griffin), unicorn, giant ants, formicoleon and salamandra (see Appendix, 3).

In light of this arrangement of material, and that of the subsequent bestiaries, the work that has come to be known as the Liber Monstrorum (de diversis generibus)³⁴ presents several anomalies. A Latin document probably written

has been written on the creature; for references, see Appendix 1. Especially note Vincent of Beauvais' three kinds of basilisk in Speculum naturale (Austria: Akademische Druck, 1964), xx, 24, col. 1474.

³² Hrabanus Maurus' encyclopedic work, De universo (more properly, De rerum naturis), in Migne, P.L., lll, 1-614, although technically of this genre, because of its more interpretive treatment, will be more usefully discussed in the section on monsters as symbols.

³³ Cf. below, monsters as signs, p. 107.

³⁴ Haupt, pp. 218-52.

in England between the seventh and ninth centuries,³⁵ it is neither a bestiary nor a travel account, bearing more resemblance to the encyclopedic format. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it discusses only monsters (although some rather ordinary creatures would not fall into either the monster or marvel category defined above),³⁶ and that its selection and organization is peculiar--not conforming to the trend being set by contemporary writings.

The Liber Monstrorum consists of 116 entries, four being introductory or summational, fifty-five describing human-type monsters, thirty-three beast-type monsters, and twenty-four serpent-type monsters. Bk. II begins with the lion--standard procedure in most bestiaries (following the entry on "man")--but the abundance of individual historical or mythological monsters from antiquity or the Middle Ages (the celebrated entry on Hygelac), and the outstanding number of marvels included demonstrate the work's peculiarity. The author reaches back into literature for his sources. No less than forty entries can be attributed to Vergil, at least

³⁵ See L. G. Whitbread, "The Liber Monstrorum and Beowulf," Medieval Studies, 36 (1974), 448ff., and the responding article by Corrado Bologna, "L. G. Whitbread, the Liber Monstrorum and Beowulf in MS, XXXVI (1974), 434-471," Cultura Neolatina, 35 (1977 for 1975), 366-69.

³⁶ Mentioned are the lion, elephant, ass, tiger, lynx, pardus, panther, hippopotamus in Bk. II, 1-10. Bk. III has many kinds of serpents, some fabulous, some not.

twenty-one are from the Old English Wonders of the East or a form of the Mirabilia, as well as two or three probable borrowings from some version of the Letter of Alexander.³⁷ Beyond its selection of material, the Liber is distinct in its remarkably short entries, more polished Latin, and complete absence of any kind of moralitas.³⁸ The expected core of monsters (amphisbaena, dragon, griffin, etc.) are notably absent as well.

Shifting to the pertinent developments in travel literature of these centuries, we come to the fictitious Letter of Fermo to the Emperor Hadrian.³⁹ It appears in a manuscript dating from the ninth century, but is thought to have been composed earlier.⁴⁰ The Letter of Fermo is the probable source of the loose collection of Latin works known as the Mirabilia, a piece possibly from the eighth, or even as early as the fourth century.⁴¹ One version of its English

³⁷ Whitbread, pp. 440ff.

³⁸ For a recent informative study of the Liber Monstrorum, its style and possible authorship, see the paper prepared for the Beowulf conference, Toronto, 1980, by Michael Lapidge: "Beowulf, Aldhelm and Wessex," soon to be published in the conference proceedings.

³⁹ Letter of Fermo, ed. H. Omont, in Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes, 1913.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Sisam, "The Compilation of the Beowulf Manuscript," in Studies in the History of Old English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 73ff.

⁴¹ Sisam, pp. 73ff, favours the eighth century while Whitbread, p. 445, maintains it is from the fourth.

translation, the Wonders of the East, we find in the same manuscript with Beowulf and a second important example of travel literature--the Old English Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle.

The history of the Letter of Alexander is more direct than that of the Wonders of the East. Also taken from a Latin version (earliest manuscript is ninth century, but, again, the date of the work is considered much earlier),⁴² its original is in Greek, and, of course, equally fictitious. The mention of Alexander (three times in the Cotton Vitellius manuscript),⁴³ as well as the similar treatment of monsters, shows some form of the Letter to be a probable influence of the Mirabilia and consequently on the Wonders of the East.

Here we have two travel documents, from a manuscript dated around 1000, which deal with monster material in a very similar manner to the fragments of Megasthenes. Although the English translator of the Letter, as Sisam has remarked,⁴⁴ is not concerned primarily with fabulous creatures but with Alexander the general, stopping his translation short of the sections on griffins, great fishes and river sirens, we can

⁴² Sisam, pp. 82ff.

⁴³ In Stanley Rypins, ed., Three Old English Prose Texts in Ms. Cotton Vitellius A xv, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), fol. 99(98)/2, 105b/20, and 106b/8.

⁴⁴ Sisam, p. 88.

still isolate instances of wildeor, nicor, fantastic nædran, wyrmcyn, indisce mys . . . in foxa gelicnisse, and the Grendel-like deor, in the version as it stands.⁴⁵ Likewise, in the Wonders of the East, we encounter the wildeor and nædran of the Letter, but we find much more. Megasthenes described the monsters, marvels and pseudo-historical individuals and tribes which a traveller to the East would see.⁴⁶ The Epistola Alexandri does the same but with a different format. Although it relates some of these characteristically fantastic tales, it limits the number of monsters considerably, concentrating on longer passages, describing at length the combat between Alexander's forces and certain beasts.

Yet when we turn to the Wonders of the East, we find monsters and marvels with attributes never before appearing in strictly travel material. Although we once again read of the giant ants (æmetan swa micle swa hundas, 100b/7) along with the same ingenious method bold men have devised to part their gold from them, we also notice, near the beginning of the account, the red hens that magically destroy anyone who touches them by flame and, soon following, the horned nædran

⁴⁵ In Rypins, pp. 1-50.

⁴⁶ Or hear of. Megasthenes, like Ktesias before him, often prefaced the most marvellous accounts with the note that this is what the Brahmin have told him, and that he found no reason to doubt them.

(basilisk?) which similarly cause anyone who touches or kills them to die immediately.⁴⁷ (See Appendix 3.) This almost formulaic fatal power was well exploited in the encyclopedias and frequently associated with the basilisk (or cockatrice --perhaps this is the hen connection), and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, following another tradition, attributes it later to the less standard monster, the catoblepas, as well as the basilisk.⁴⁸

Additions such as these indicate influence outside the travel tradition, as well might the expanded number of marvellous races dealt with in the Wonders of the East and the more linear progression of the narrative, which resulted in a list of regions with fabulous animals or races divided by vague geographical notes. Even the very concentration on the marvellous elements of journeys to the East suggests a taste in literature, especially that of far-away places, which the encyclopedias and bestiaries developed so well.

⁴⁷ Hens: gif he hwylc man niman wile oppe him o æthrineð þonne forbærnað hy sona eal his lic þ(æt) syndon ungefrægelicu liblac--Rypins, fol. 99(98)/11-13.

And snakes: gif hy hwylcne man sleað oppe â æthrineð þonne swylteð he sona--Rypins, fol. 99b/17-18.

⁴⁸ De rerum proprietatibus (Frankfurt, 1601; rpt. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), Bk. 18, ch. 15.

Encyclopedia and Travel Accounts (Later)

As the centuries wore on, medieval authors continued to describe monsters in a way which suggests that they were merely strange breeds of animals. In our survey we can now move to the twelfth century and the writer known as Honorius Augustodunensis, once thought to be from Autun. His De imagine mundi⁴⁹ is arranged in three books, the first dealing primarily with places, animals and planets, the second with the calendar, and the third with history. Book One devotes a small chapter to marvels (cyclops, monoculi, Arimaspei, Scinopodae and more). In the next chapter we find the monsters ceucocroca, mantichore, monoceros and giant snakes (see Appendix 3).

The ceucocroca is described as the swiftest of animals with the voice of a man. Pliny seemed to be talking about a kind of hyena. This same vocal attribute probably led Konrad Gesner (1516-65) to equate it centuries later in his extensive encyclopedia with the mantichore, which has the face of a man.⁵⁰ Moreover, the mantichore, according to Ktesias, is the Persian for the Greek ἀνθρωποφάγος or

⁴⁹ Migne, P.L., 172:115-86.

⁵⁰ Gesner, Historiae animalium, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (1585-1602). The ceucocroca is commonly spelled leucrota or leucrote, but also appears in texts as ceucrocata, crocata or lucrote.

"man-eater," and is thus associated with the tiger or were-wolf.⁵¹ Man-beasts were for centuries a probability for western man, notwithstanding the ultimate impossibility of their attributes. The "truth" for most people at the time was that these animals probably did exist. Troll-like creatures of northern writings should be considered in light of this already established credibility. The additional horror of a monster with human features must have, like the marvellous races, particularly intrigued popular thought.

The next influential encyclopedic treatment of monsters was written by the Englishman Alexander Neckam (c. 1180), a scholar living in the city of Paris. His De naturis rerum⁵² illustrates a much different handling of similar material. The work displays scholarly, theological and literary tendencies, yet has the anecdotal flavour of folklore. The first two books of the De naturis are a manual of natural sciences, organizationally akin to the works we are now examining. The following three books, a commentary on Ecclesiastes, demonstrates the direction many natural science works were taking in these years. The intellectual atmosphere of this century, combined with the influence of the bestiaries

⁵¹ See T. H. White, The Bestiary (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954; rpt. Capricorn, 1960), p. 51n.

⁵² Ed. Thomas Wright, in Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, Vol. 34 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863), pp. 1-366.

on natural science rendered works like Neckam's highly interpretive. His entries, considerably moralistic, are followed by a discourse on virtues and vices. Thus, his work, like Hrabanus Maurus' before him, more properly belongs to the section on monsters as symbols.

A note or two on his selection of material, however, should be made here. Although he cites Solinus, Cassiodorus, Aristotle, Pliny, Ovid and Claudianus, he admits that his knowledge of animals is imperfect. He expresses the desire to write about those animals which are less well known. The only monsters, then, which he talks about are the dragon, basilisk, amphisbaena and phoenix--once again, the "core" of medieval monsters.

The thirteenth century, far from altering this encyclopedic pattern, produced a number of long tomes attempting to encompass the nature of all things in the world. In the middle of this century, five large works were written which catalogued, renewed and sustained the medieval monster tradition in the natural sciences.

One particularly noteworthy work is Thomas de Cantimpré's Liber de natura rerum.⁵³ Written between 1228 and 1244, its major source is Jacques de Vitry. Thomas' treatment of monsters (see Appendix 4) reveals extensive, well-catalogued

⁵³ Editio princeps secundum codicis manuscriptorum (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 1973).

coverage. Unique in the attention given them, the eastern marvels comprise a book of their own, after those books on the parts of the human body and man's soul and nature. Thomas' opinion is that they do not possess a human soul. He relates St. Anthony's encounter with one and refers back to Augustine for support. After establishing this point, he proceeds to describe over forty marvellous races testifying to the survival of the tradition stemming from the fourth-century B.C. writings of Ktesias.

The entries are quite complete, often standard, frequently quoting Pliny or Solinus. Pegasus (Bk. 4.89) is not only the mythological figure, but a breed of creatures found in Ethiopia. The formicarum leo is the same as the formicaleon or mirmicoleon "ant-lion," a creature which in its less fabulous descriptions is a large ant which preys upon other ants and is thus the lion of ants, or even a species of spider that ambushes ants. It can be found in other accounts described as a monster, half ant, half lion, with characteristics of both, and hence the name formicaleon. Whether the names of composite creatures like this are derivative or prescriptive is a complicated question, and if nothing else, bears witness to the role of written tradition in the history of the monster.

Thomas' work is the source of Albertus Magnus' De

animalibus.⁵⁴ Albertus (1193?-1280), bishop of Ratisbon, wrote these twenty-six books some time in the 1250s. The first volume (Bks. I-XII) is concerned with man and specific organs of the body, while the second (Bks. XIII-XXVI), continues the discussion of organs before treating individual species. As Appendix 4 reveals, Albertus' selection of monsters was also quite inclusive. His entries are lengthy with many references and with a conscious scepticism for a few of the most extraordinary attributes. For example, he maintains that the basilisk kills not by sight, but by breath, and that it is impossible that it is hatched from the egg of a cock.

Albertus also mentions the pilosi, "shaggy ones," a breed of beings with the upper half of a man and the lower of a goat. He states that some say it is a breed of ape. Bartholomaeus after him calls them incubi and daemones, referring to the same legend of St. Anthony's encounter with one that Thomas refers to in his book on marvels. This faun-like creature had many names and in Thomas' work the figure, probably originating in folklore, becomes identified not only with classical mythological beings (satyrs), but also with the eastern marvellous races.

⁵⁴ Ed. Hermann Stadler, 2 vols. (Münster: Aschendorffsche, 1916-20).

Three great thirteenth-century encyclopedias were written within a few years of each other. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Vincent of Beauvais and Brunetto Latini each wrote extensive works which carried on the monster tradition in the natural sciences. (See Appendix 4.) Born in England, Bartholomaeus studied in France and joined the Franciscans. His De rerum proprietatibus (probably written before 1260) was extremely popular, as evidenced by the many extant manuscripts and the 1397 translation into English by John Trevisa.⁵⁵

Bartholomaeus was devoted to natural science and his nineteen books reflect a scholarly collection of data whose sources stop not at Isidore, but include Robert Grosseteste, Alfred of Sareshel, and Avicenna, among others. His designations of monsters vary somewhat from previous writers. The mantichore, for example, he calls baricos and refers to Avicenna. The attributes are clearly those of a mantichore, including the three rows of teeth and tail of scorpion.

His catoblepas entry is standard. An Ethiopian creature with a great pendulous head and a little body, it is an effective guard, fatal to all who look upon it. In this he follows Pliny, Aelian and Solinus. Sometimes confused with the heraldic yale,⁵⁶ the animal is called centicore in French.

⁵⁵ On the Properties of Things, trans. John Trevisa, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁵⁶ White, p. 55n.

His mermaid entry, however, is unusual in that it equates the beast with the classical sirens who are part of a solid nucleus for the bestiary entries. This identification illustrates one more of the persistent discrepancies in medieval monster writings. The merging of one monster into another was a common practice. We have seen it happen with the unicorn and rhinoceros, basilisk and cockatrice, mantichore, leucrota and baricos, catoblepas and yale, and now mermaid and siren. This remains an incomplete list and more will be discussed below. This tendency is one of the fundamental characteristics of medieval monsters. Dragons are no different in this respect. Certainly all natural science accounts would be subjected to contrary reports and labels in these centuries. The consistent identification of monsters would be especially problematic as there was no empirical evidence. The fact that these accounts are as standardized as they are is due to scholarship and unshakable trust in authorities.

The classical sirens, half woman, half fowl, who tried to seduce Odysseus and his men,⁵⁷ later became associated with the mermaid, half woman, half fish, who also used her seductive powers to harm men. An early, possibly the earliest, confusion of these two monsters popular in classical and Celtic mythologies occurs in the preface of the Liber

⁵⁷ Homer, Odyssey, XII, 39ff.

Monstrorum. Here the author describes the image of the marine-girl siren (marina puella sirina) as possessing a head of reason as well as a shaggy and scaly body.⁵⁸ This perhaps suggests the inclusion of both the fowl-like (feathery or hairy, i.e., shaggy) attribute and the fish-like (scaly) attribute. Both versions of the siren occur in later works, often with conflicting illustrations, or with illustrations showing both wings and fish's tail.⁵⁹

Bartholomaeus' work is noteworthy in this study in one further way. He describes the satyr as having a crooked nose, horns in the forehead, and goat's feet--the classical

⁵⁸ The author of the Liber monstrorum uses the image of the siren/mermaid, part human, part shaggy (mammal or fowl) and part scaly (reptile or fish) to outline poetically the organization of his work. Book I is filled with human-like monsters, Book II with animal-like monsters, and Book III with serpent-like monsters. Concerned with substantiating his stories, yet conscious of the "wondrous discourse of rumor," the author makes the siren in her tripartite form also function metaphorically as the head of reason from which follow the shaggy and scaly stories of the book: ". . . et de his primum eloquar quae sunt aliquo modo credenda, et sequentem historiam sibi quisque discernat, quod per haec antra monstrorum marinae puellae quandam formulam sirinae depingam, ut sit capite rationis quod tantae diversorum generum hispidae squamosaeque secuntur fabulae" (Haupt, p. 222). Mis-translated in the past, the passage reads: "I will first talk of these things which must be believed in some way and the history following anyone can discern for himself, for through these caves of monsters I will imagine the certain form of the marine girl siren, so that it may be by the head of reason that such shaggy and scaly stories of diverse kinds follow." I am indebted to Colin Chase for pointing out this misunderstood passage.

⁵⁹ White, p. 134.

definition. He goes on to say that some are called cynocephali, some cyclops, some headless with eyes in their shoulders, some with large ears or one huge foot. Apparently, for some reason, the marvels had become associated with the name satyr, instead of the ape, which is customary in these writings. The satyr was additionally confused with the medieval wild man.⁶⁰

Around the time of Bartholomaeus' work Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264) wrote his contribution to this area called the Speculum naturale.⁶¹ Appendix 4 shows that this work was clearly imbedded in the same tradition of written accounts as those previously examined. Here we have an example of a great medieval writer who not only tolerates but actively perpetuates the medieval monster tradition. His entries are detailed, "accurate" according to traditions, and not overly sceptical.

One particularly interesting monster that Vincent includes in his work is the draconcopede. He attributes to Bede the statement that these great serpents with heads like virgins and bodies of dragons constitute the shape which the devil adopted to deceive Eve, hiding the dragon part in the bushes. Vincent was by no means the first to discuss these

⁶⁰ Cf. Bernheimer, Wild Men.

⁶¹ (Austria: Akademische Druck, 1964).

creatures. The Liber Monstrorum called them huge men with tails of dragons. Albertus Magnus listed them as huge serpents with the virginal face of beardless men. Associating them with the serpent in the garden of Eden is iconographically verifiable.⁶²

One further thirteenth-century encyclopedic account should be mentioned here. Brunetto Latini's Li livres dou tresor (1266)⁶³ is of the same plan as Vincent's work but not as grand. Born in Italy, then exiled, Brunetto Latini travelled to Spain, England and France before he died in 1294. His work uses the standard authorities, and although more limited, does give accounts of sirens, basilisks, dragons, lucrotes, mantichores, unicorns and the phoenix. Once again, we see the inevitability of at least these monsters in the medieval man's conception of his natural world.

At the end of this century, interest in the east and its animals was revived by Marco Polo's account of his travels. By 1295 and the comparatively scientific observations of Marco Polo, we find a public unwilling to believe his slightly mundane, less fabulous Milione, as its distorted accompanying illustrations show.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the account does mention

⁶² For example, see the stained-glass window of Hans Acker (1420) found in the Besserer Chapel, Ulm Cathedral.

⁶³ Ed. Francis J. Carmody (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975, from the 1948 Berkeley ed.).

⁶⁴ Wittkower, "Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition

the unicorn, a giant clawed snake, tailed and dog-headed men as well as explaining away griffins as large eagles and salamanders as a kind of metal.⁶⁵

Marco Polo was more concerned with people, especially individuals, than with animals. He relates interesting anecdotes, including stories of the mythical personage Prester John, whose kingdom often held monsters of various kinds (e.g., unicorns, centaurs, the phoenix, flying dragons, robes made of salamander skin).⁶⁶

Odoric of Pordenone's travels might again have been a disappointment to the more monster-loving public. A native of the small European country, Friuli, the saintly Odoric travelled between 1316 and 1330, baptizing and performing miracles. Judging by the number of Latin manuscripts and Italian translations, Odoric's work was widely read. His material contains less of the fabulous, but does mention dog-faced people and the Tartar lamb (little lambs hatched from

of the Marvels of the East," in Allegory and the Migration of Symbols, pp. 76-92, orig. in Oriente Poliano (Rome, 1957).

⁶⁵ Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, The Travels of Marco Polo, trans. Aldo Ricci, intro. and index E. Denison Ross (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931).

⁶⁶ For development of this legend, see Robert Silverberg, The Realm of Prester John (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), and Sabine Baring-Gould, Curious Myths of the Middle Ages (London: Rivingtons, 1877), pp. 32-54.

melons).⁶⁷

Much better received for these aspects was the fraudulent journal of Mandeville (1397) with its dragons, goat-men, centaur, griffin, basilisk, unicorn, cynocephali and many other marvels.⁶⁸ Equally fraudulent was John Mandeville himself as well as the entire frame of his journal. Thought to be originally written in French, not by an Englishman, the work survives in 250 manuscripts of diverse languages. Its chief source is a series of French translations of genuine travel accounts (including Odoric's) done by Jean le Long (1351).⁶⁹

These travel accounts certainly did not mark the end of the encyclopedic treatment of monsters, nor did they stop the popular bestiary tradition which will be examined later. For an illuminating look at the decay of this tradition, we must turn to the much later seventeenth-century Vulgar Errors of Sir Thomas Browne.⁷⁰ In this work dedicated to debunking popular myths, Browne does just that to the common under-

⁶⁷ See Henry Yule, Cathay and the Way Hither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China, Vol. II (repub. Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen, 1966).

⁶⁸ Mandeville's Travels, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. xiv-xvi.

⁷⁰ The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Simon Wilkin, Vol. I (London: Bohn, 1852).

standing of the basilisk, griffin, phoenix, salamander, amphisbaena and unicorn's horn. His objections come as no surprise. What is noteworthy here is his selection of monsters that needed to be discredited and the fact that this was necessary at such a late date. Once again, the most familiar monsters appear. After tracing their histories in natural science works throughout the Middle Ages, and considering this need to abolish them finally, it must be acknowledged that these creatures were a definite part of the real world to more than a handful of superstitious common folk.

But where does all this leave us? We now can see the clearly documented belief in the medieval monster as real animal--in most instances carefully defined. In other instances we observe a merging of identities of similar monsters. We also have noted the merging of two written traditions in this study, the encyclopedic and the travel account. The concern about human characteristics--especially possession of a soul--has been demonstrated as well. With all this, we have but one aspect of the total picture. The medieval monster surely was more than an entry in a science book. My intention here is to stress that it did indeed have this status as well as the more literary ones. As with the dragon, so too with monsters in general, we should examine whatever evidence is helpful in establishing its characteristics as animal. In this context we must include

a small number of fables.

In the fable of the Man and the Unicorn (Perry, #609), a unicorn chases a man up into a tree. Most of the narrative and indeed all of the moral is concerned with the man after he has climbed into the tree to escape the unicorn. The unicorn is used merely as a threat to the safety of the man and in this instance could easily be seen as a rhinoceros, indicating only fierceness and nothing more enlightening.

A fourteenth-century work tells the story of the Lion and the Unicorn (Perry, #645). One day a lion, pretending to be ill, meets his principal enemy, the unicorn, and asks if he can borrow his horn to use as a cane on the long journey to see his wife before he dies. The unicorn believes him and gives him the horn, completely disarming himself. When the lion uses it against him, the unicorn denounces the lion as a traitor. The moral, spoken by the lion, states that someone is a fool to help his enemy.

This fable does not tell us much either. The traditional enemy of the unicorn in encyclopedias is the elephant, not the lion. The horn, of course, is its chief defence, and although literary licence may have allowed it to become removable, it does not fully account for the unicorn's gullibility and kindness--unless this unicorn is based not only on the infamously fierce rhinoceros, but also the virgin-tamed stag-like creature. There is no reference to Christ--the first and foremost interpretation of the latter.

animal.

Fables such as these and the Satyr and the Man (see above, n. 28) give little of the descriptive material we need to establish the identity of the creatures discussed. Because so few monster fables exist, they can also tell us little about the connotations connected with such creatures. One strange fable, included in Caxton's collection and known as Poggio's Monsters because the story is taken from those of fifteenth-century Italian humanist Poggio, is of a very different nature.⁷¹ The short account tells of freaks--half human creatures which undoubtedly were influenced by the marvels, yet have undergone the metamorphosis that all the marvels were to undergo by the end of the Middle Ages. At that time, the books on such creatures were obviously stressing the "freakish" sideshow aspect which is the sad degeneration of Ktesias' and Megasthenes' alarming and significant accounts of the world we live in. With these observations, we leave the monster as animal behind and examine the process in which it accumulates symbolic meaning.

C. Monsters as Symbols

The Bestiary

The categories of writing involved in treating monsters

⁷¹ Caxton's Aesop, ed. with intro. and notes R. T. Lenaghan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 220-22.

as animals and those involved in attributing symbolic meaning are bound to overlap. The distinctions made here were made a thousand years after these writings in an attempt to organize the materials at hand and to clarify the various levels that the writers of that time used in discussing monsters. Still, the logical first place to look for medieval monsters treated as symbols is the bestiary.

The form of the bestiary, a collection of entries with a description of the animal and the moralitas or significatio following is vastly different from that of encyclopedia and travel literature. The descriptive element, of course, is common to all, and we see in the example of the Wonders of the East that the listing of various entries, with little or no connective narrative, similar to the bestiary, can develop in travel accounts and is identical to the encyclopedia format. However, the "meaning" of a marvel in, for example, the Mirabilia, can only be what it, if the word is acceptable in connection with monsters, represents empirically, i.e., an unusual phenomenon in a distant land. There is clearly no symbolism or allegory intended. In an early version of the Physiologus, on the other hand, we observe that the standard medieval (but not classical) description of the unicorn and virgin is followed by the analogy of the Incarnation of Christ.⁷²

⁷² Francis J. Carmody, Physiologus latinus (versio B)

This has been well noted. It is a clear illustration of Chenu's symbolist mentality.⁷³ It is also firmly based on the authority of the Bible (with appropriate references quoted in the Physiologus entries) and later supported by exegetical writings of those such as Bede and Hugh of St. Cher.⁷⁴ What is more interesting here is the way that the allegorical interpretation evolves into ethical signification. Because the siren is analogous to the temptations of sin, it acquires a negative connotation which is employed with a certain amount of subtlety in later vernacular works dealing with its descendant, the mermaid. The confusion of monsters results in transference of ethical connotations as well as the physical attributes discussed above. Travel accounts and encyclopedias, by establishing many of the monsters and

(Paris: E. Droz, 1939).

the siren: "Sic igitur et illi decipiuntur qui deliciis huius saeculi et pompis et theatralibus voluptatibus delectantur, tragediis ac diversis musicis melodiis dissoluti et gravati somno sopiti efficiuntur adversarios praeda . . ." (p. 25).

and the unicorn: "Sic et dominus noster Iesus Christus, spiritalis unicornis descendens in uterum virginis, per carnem ex ea sumptam . . ." (p. 31).

⁷³ M.-D. Chenu, Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 104.

⁷⁴ Cf. Pseudo-Bede's commentary on Ps. 91:11 in Migne, P.L., 93:980, and Hugh of St. Cher, Opera omnia in univsum vetus et novum testamentum (Venice: Nicolaus Pezzana, 1732), IV, 34-35, for his interpretation of Is. 13:21.

marvels as hostile forces, contain certain ethical colouring as well. Note Alexander's reported slaughter of a shameful race of women (æwisce on lichoman, Rypins, fol. 106(103)/1-3), or his protection of a particularly gentle race of people (gæstlipende, Rypins, fol. 106(103)/10-20, 106b/1-11) in the Wonders of the East. An outstanding example of this same tendency is the permanent "damage" done to the reputation of the dragon by its role in the Apocalypse, evidenced by its demonic use in numerous saints' lives. Similarly, the unicorn, because of its analogy to Christ, will retain its positive connotations, becoming a favourite in art, just as the phoenix, with its bestiary interpretation of the Resurrection, becomes a favourite in literature.

A reasonable objection at this point would be that other influences supplied all these monsters with their ethical accoutrements long before they emerged in the bestiary tradition. The Homeric siren was already a hostile monster. The unicorn and phoenix were two of the four beneficent spiritual animals in the Chinese Book of Rites.⁷⁵ And the dragon, also in the Book of Rites⁷⁶ and renowned as a benevolent creature

⁷⁵ Lum, p. 242.

⁷⁶ The fourth animal is the tortoise. It presents an interesting foursome in light of the questions surrounding the extant Old English Physiologus, whose three entries are the panther, partridge and whale (asp-turtle), thought by some to be fragmentary and by others to be representative of the major groupings of animals--beast, bird, and fish. Translating the whale literally from its original Greek as

in the east, nevertheless, appears early in the west as the malevolent water goddess Tiamat defeated by Marduk in the 1800 B.C. rendering of the Babylonian creation myth.

This has been one of the key considerations in the study of monsters, and perhaps its chief obstacle. Tracing origins of monsters, although at times enlightening and seemingly fundamental to the study of individual occurrences in literature and art, too often becomes a lively but ultimately frustrating excursion into the ill-documented eras of our cultural past. Outlining and noting important tendencies, however, especially in a specific period, with a close eye to its literary and artistic input, can, on the other hand, yield satisfying results.

Hence the siren, hostile, like countless other monsters or marvels from antiquity, gains new richness in its heavily suggestive medieval siren-mermaid form. The same can be said for our other examples. As is apparent, the medieval man rarely created a monster, he was simply the best at dressing it up.

The two-fold description-moralitas format of the bestiary suggests once again a comparison to the fable. The bestiary's proprietas section can be seen to correspond to the narrative

asp-turtle (dragon-tortoise), we find a parallel to the Chinese unicorn, phoenix, dragon, tortoise combination, perhaps indicating a far-removed, yet similar precedent to the abbreviated bestiary form.

of the fable and the spiritualitas to the usual moral added at the end. The more elaborate the bestiary, the more pronounced the similarity. T. H. White's translation of a typical twelfth-century bestiary, for example, notes in its entry on the lion that "so far as relations with men are concerned, the nature of lions is that they do not get angry unless they are wounded." Then, "any decent human ought to pay attention to this. For men do get angry when they are not wounded, and they oppress the innocent although the law of Christ bids them to let even the guilty go free."⁷⁷

The "description" half of this sample, dealing with the lion's relation to men, easily can be imagined in a more dramatic version, perhaps with appropriate dialogue and a story line reminiscent of the Lion and the Mouse fable. The moralitas portion could be substituted almost without change at the end of a fable. The differences are clear. The fable demonstrates: (1) frequent personification and combinations of the animals, leading to (2) a more dramatic narrative and (3) a secular moral as opposed to the Christian allegory⁷⁸ and (4) a more purely literary as opposed to scientific or religious purpose of the work as a whole.

⁷⁷ White, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Of course, both fables and bestiary entries can, and often do, stand with no moralitas at all.

The similarities, then, beyond form itself, are seen in the use of animals to reflect man's faults and the attribution of ethical signification to the particular animals involved. Seen in this context, the fable and its connotative powers is a convenient bridge to the truly symbolic level of the bestiary.

The developing content of the medieval bestiary yields even more than digressions into its form. Its precursor is the first- or second-century Greek Physiologus--the name of either the collection of short descriptions and spiritual interpretations of animals, plants and rocks, or possibly the author of them. The Latin version, dating anywhere from the second to fifth century,⁷⁹ was soon translated into most of the vernacular languages of Europe.

The Latin Physiologus had basically four versions,⁸⁰ containing thirty-seven entries of rocks, beasts, birds and fish. Six are monsters--the phoenix, siren, onocentaur, hydrus, salamander and unicorn. The sources of these early versions include Megasthenes, Ktesias, Pliny, Solinus and Aelianus.

⁷⁹ Carmody, Phys. lat., dates it before Ambrose (c. 386) while M. R. James, The Bestiary (Oxford, 1928), places it no earlier than the fifth century.

⁸⁰ Florence McCulloch, in Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), conveniently outlines the various versions (Y, A, B, C, B-Is) and (according to M. R. James' divisions) the subsequent "families" of bestiaries.

After Isidore's Etymologiae, the bestiary's "first family" developed what is known as a B-Is version, expanding the number of entries and the information within the already existing entries. Philippe de Thaon, Guillaume le Clerc and Pierre de Beauvais,⁸¹ founders of the French bestiary tradition, all based their work on the Latin B-Is versions. Although all three writers depend on the Latin text, only Pierre de Beauvais' longer work seems to have used Isidore's material to the extent of substantially expanding the list of monsters.

How precisely does this material differ from the encyclopedias and travel accounts? We can readily appreciate the nature of the Physiologus from the six monster entries found in the B version. The phoenix entry begins with a comparison of the bird to Christ because of its power to rise again from the dead, together with a scriptural quotation. The second section of the entry is a standard encyclopedia entry about the phoenix, except for the imbedded "dicit Physiologus"--a characteristic phrase in this work and subsequent bestiaries. The third section returns to the biblical reference, adding

⁸¹ Philippe de Thaon, Le bestiaire, text critique, ed. Emmanuel Walberg (Paris: H. Welter, 1900); Guillaume le Clerc, Le bestiaire, ed. Robert Reinsch (Germany: Titell-Nummer, 1847; rpt. Wiesbaden, 1967); Pierre de Beauvais, Bestiaire (short version), ed. Guy R. Mermier (Paris: Nizet, 1977). Important in the French bestiaries is also Gervaise of Tilbury, Le bestiaire, ed. P. Meyer, in Romania, 1. (1872), 420-43.

other relevant ones and expanding the allegory.⁸²

This becomes a common structural pattern. The encyclopedia and travel material then precedes and/or follows the allegorical interpretation which is liberally supported by Scripture. The entry on sirens and onocentaurs (the usual bestiary coupling) is similar. The line "Sirens and demons will dance in Babylon and hairy ones and onocentaurs will inhabit the houses" (Is. 13:22) prefaces the standard description of sirens. Just as the seduced sailors are taken, so too are those who, taken in by the desires of this world (music and drama), fall prey to their enemies.⁸³ The description of the onocentaur follows stressing that the creature cannot speak, having the promise of piety but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:5).

The unicorn entry begins with the description of the indomitable creature subdued only by the virgin.⁸⁴ A comparatively long passage equating Christ with the animal follows. Christ is the unicorn because he descends into the uterus of the virgin and becomes flesh through her and then is killed. The analogy continues to expand. For example, Christ is compared to this small animal because of the humility of his Incarnation.

⁸² Carmody, Phys. lat., pp. 20-21.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

The story of the hydrus sneaking into the mouth of the sleeping crocodile and eating his viscera, thus conquering him, is allegorized as Christ who harrows hell.⁸⁵ In a similar fashion, the salamander, whom fire cannot harm, is compared to Ananias, Azarias and Misael in Dan. 3:27 and is said to be the faith by which all holy men can extinguish the power of fire.⁸⁶

This type of allegorization is familiar to all with a knowledge of medieval theological writings. What is interesting here is the selection of monsters which were included in this early Christianized and abridged encyclopedia. The writer's purpose is clear. No longer is it to understand and catalogue the world as it is. Now the emphasis has shifted to what the world means and how man can learn spiritual truths from his natural surroundings. With this in mind, the selection of monsters becomes understandable. The allegorization of the phoenix, unicorn and siren was a natural development aided by the highly suggestive stories attached to them and their definite roles in Scripture which are played upon by the exegetes.⁸⁷ The bestiaries, then, especially the initial Physiologus, concentrate heavily upon animals, which, because of their scriptural occurrences lend

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁸⁷ For biblical exegesis of monsters, see below, p. 89.

themselves quite easily to this type of symbolic treatment.⁸⁸

As the centuries wore on, the Physiologus evolved into bestiaries, expanding the number of beasts and excluding rocks and plants. Certain animal entries were added without interpretation. Later, with its increased popularity, the bestiary appeared in many anonymous versions. Some bestiaries, or bestiary-like works, have survived, however, which can be attributed to individuals and can be approximately dated.

One such work is Hrabanus Maurus' De universo or more properly, De rerum naturis (9th C.).⁸⁹ Hrabanus, an abbot of Fulda, can be judged by this twenty-book work as no original thinker, but one of the many scholars involved in the encyclopedic treatment of material. His work varies from this format, however, in its particularly religious outlook, beginning with a section on God and continuing throughout with allegorizations and biblical references. His monsters include four from the Physiologus, but also the dog-ants, dragon and basilisk. His descriptions are standard and his interpretations are as follows:

- 1) The rebirth of the phoenix signifies the resurrection of the just.
- 2) The unicorn represents Christ because of humility

⁸⁸ The same is true for the dragon. See below, p. 138.

⁸⁹ Migne, P.L., 111:1-614. See below, Appendix 1, for specific references.

and strength.

- 3) The griffin signifies ferocity of persecutors and passion of pride.
- 4) The hydrus is Christ harrowing hell.
- 5) The dragon is the devil or persecutor of the Church.
- 6) The gold-hoarding ants signify useful work.
- 7) The basilisk is the devil who kills the incautious at once.
- 8) The salamander represents all who endure against fire.

Hrabanus' work remained outside the true bestiary tradition even though his approach to these entries was quite similar to that of the Physiologus. Clearly, he was using information from other encyclopedia and travel material as evidenced by his treatment of the basilisk, griffin, and dog-ants which do not occur in the Physiologus. A purer form of the Physiologus survived in the eleventh- or twelfth-century work called by the same name attributed to a Theobaldus. The exact identity of Theobaldus is not known⁹⁰ and his verses are not too helpful to our study. His material is more of an abridged rendering of the various prose versions of the Physiologus--although at times he seems to draw directly from Isidore--and includes only two monsters, the siren and onocentaur. Both entries are short, with very little

⁹⁰ See Theobaldus, Physiologus, ed. P. T. Eden (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), for a concise discussion of Theobaldus' place in the genre, his possible identity, an edition of the Latin poem and a working translation.

interpretation.

We look to France for the development of the true spirit of the Physiologus. Philippe de Thaon's bestiary is dated approximately 1121, the oldest French bestiary extant.

Written in Anglo-Norman rhyming couplets, the work duplicates the B version of the Physiologus in its treatment of monsters except that the dragon in the panther section is so elaborated that the title of the entry properly bears its name as well (see Appendix 6). In the interpretation of the story of the panther and the dragon (see below, p. 139), the panther who sleeps for three days is Christ in the tomb. When he awoke, people gathered to his voice, just as the animals did to that of the panther, except the dragon who, as the devil, hides in fear.

Most of the other symbolizations mirror the Physiologus. Some variances are:

- 1) The unicorn is Christ; the virgin is Mary, whose bosom represents the Holy Church and whose kiss represents peace. The unicorn's sleep is likened to Christ's death which is our redemption.
- 2) The hydrus is God who takes on the flesh of man (when it rolls in mud/clay to slip into the crocodile's mouth).
- 3) The siren is a creature with the top half of a woman, the tail of a fish and the feet of a falcon. She signifies the riches of the earth. The ocean represents the earth, the ship, humans, and the sailors aboard are men's souls. The siren weeps in good weather just as the rich man complains to God even in a good hour.
- 4) The work, overall, contains comparatively few biblical quotations.

Appendix 6 illustrates the small variation of the French bestiaries following Philippe. All treat approximately the same material with the exception of Pierre de Beauvais' long version, which includes the harpy, basilisk, griffin and catoblepas. With the continuing encyclopedic tradition of especially the latter three of these animals, these additions are understandable. The French bestiaries, on the whole, are unique in their slightly more poetic treatment of the animals. What they lack in number of analogies, compared to their source, the Physiologus, they make up for in their elaboration of each particular one. This makes for less diversity in the symbolic handling of monsters, but provides more persuasive and memorable symbolizations.

Contemporary to these French bestiaries is a work erroneously attributed to Hugh of St. Victor. An early twelfth-century work properly known as De bestiis et aliis rebus,⁹¹ it shows a comprehensive handling of monsters. Not only does this bestiary include the Physiologus entries (those which the French writers seemed content with), but also the list of monsters which were familiar in the encyclopedias of the time. This century sees the merging of the two traditions, producing what James called the second family of bestiaries where the popularity of the genre spurred

⁹¹ Migne, P.L., 177:9-164.

writers on to create new symbols out of most elements of their natural world.

Interestingly, the Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor does not venture too many of his own interpretations of monsters. He carries along most of those mentioned above, merely expanding some and leaving many of his monsters with a descriptive entry devoid of any interpretation. The extensive analogy of the dragon and the devil quoted on p. 24 above can be found, along with the interpretation of sirens as whores, the phoenix as the Resurrection and the odour of the Holy Spirit and the onocentaur as the mad or tongue-tied man. The biblical references are profuse.

Alexander Neckam adds little new to the interpretations already presented. His phoenix is, of course, the Resurrection. The two-headed amphisbaena is, interestingly, an allegory for the dichotomy of youth and age, the pious and impious. The dragon is the antiquus draco (cf. Rev.) or the devil which pursues man.

The thirteenth century produced the third family of the bestiary. A few more monsters were added. Those such as the chimera and cerberus show a borrowing of classical rather than medieval monsters. Another important innovation was the full-fledged inclusion of the marvels. Never really forgotten, these races were on the periphery of the symbolic handling of monsters. Later centuries show an amalgamation of the material of all the traditions, with the result that

many of the races lost whatever (albeit nebulous) geographical placement they once had.

One last curious use of the monster in this genre was Richard de Fournival's thirteenth-century Le bestiaire d'amour.⁹² Here the symbols are no longer spiritual, but secular. The work is addressed to the author's lover and the animals' attributes are interpreted as symbols of a secular love rather than a divine one. There are no entries as such, but a stream of analogies, one leading into another, with, for example, the siren in the hardly surprising role of the beloved herself. This usage is an anomaly to the tradition, portending the subsequent Renaissance use of symbols and emblems.

This sampling of bestiaries has been meant to convey the nature and development of the genre. It is by no means complete. Moreover, the bestiary, in all its forms, is not the only genre to use monsters as symbols.

The Bible

One notable characteristic of the bestiary is its use of Scripture. Occasionally the writer will expand an analogy, but the fundamental allegories drawn from the

⁹² Li bestiaires d'amours di Maistre Richart de Fournival e li response du bestiaire, ed. Cesare Segre (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1957).

descriptions of the beasts are rarely original. It is possible to trace many of these interpretations back to the biblical exegetes of the time. For the most part, bestiaries served to confirm, expand and popularize the symbolic use of animals. Once again, material overlaps between genres. Furthermore, medieval exegesis forms a considerable study of its own, and the following short synopsis of its part in the development of the medieval monster cannot be comprehensive. In it, I hope to show how the bestiaries were influenced and will offer a look at some important and representative exegetes in the process of developing the symbolic monster.

The list on the following page provides an adequate number of references for our purposes. Those passages dealing with the dragon will be examined in a later chapter. The exegesis is selected from Augustine, Bede, Pope Gregory, the Glossa Ordinaria and Hugh of St. Cher.⁹³

Examination of references to the unicorn, basilisk, lamia, siren, onocentaur and griffin will demonstrate the general use of monsters in the Bible. The exegesis reveals the same problems encountered in any medieval monster literature, namely, identification and possible interpretations.

⁹³ Augustine, in Migne, P.L., 36, 37; Beda Venerabilis, in Migne, P.L., 93; Gregorius I, the Great, in Migne, P.L., 75, 76; Hughes de Saint Cher, Opera omnia in universum vetus et novum testamentum, 8 vols. (Venice: Nicolaus Pezzana, 1732); Nicholas de Lyre (Glossa Ordinaria), Biblia sacra cum glossa ordinaria primum quidem a Strabo Fuldensis collecta, 7 vols. (Parisiis: Franciscus Fevardentium, 1590).

Biblical References to Monsters

Unicorn	Job 39:9-10 Deut. 33:17 Num. 23:22 Isaiah 34:7 Luke 1:69 (horn) Psalms 21(22):21 28(29):6 77(78):69 91(92):11
Basilisk	Jer. 8:17 Prov. 23:32 Psalms 90(91):13 Isaiah 11:8 14:29 30:6
Lamia (Lilith?)	Isaiah 34:14 Lam. 4:3
Siren	Isaiah 13:22
Onocentaur	Isaiah 34:14
Griffin	Deut. 14:11
Pilosus (satyr?)	Isaiah 34:14

The unicorn once again is confused with the rhinoceros, both in attributes and in the actual Latin translation of the Hebrew "reem" into either unicornis or rhinoceros. The basilisk (regulus in the Vulgate) is often glossed as an ordinary serpent. The phoenix becomes an especially difficult example because its Greek origin φοινίξ can mean a purple-red colour, a palm tree or the fruit thereof, or a musical instrument as well as the fabulous bird. Used as a proper noun, it means a Phoenician. Consequently, an obscure passage as in Job 29:18 in which the Septuagint uses φοινίκος, has been translated palma in the Vulgate, rendering the clause "and I shall number my days as a palm tree." Although the phoenix, known for its longevity, would fit nicely in this context, the following verse alluding to leaves and roots justifies the palm tree translation in this instance.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the Vulgate and its medieval commentators are extremely useful in the study of the monster as symbol regardless of whether the monsters were otherwise interpreted in a different time or language.

The griffin is mentioned in a straightforward passage. Deuteronomy warns that "Unclean birds you must not eat,

⁹⁴ A further complication is that the Hebrew word can mean either "sand" or "phoenix." See N. F. Blake's edition of the Old English poem The Phoenix (Manchester: University Press, 1964), intro., p. 21.

namely, the eagle, griffin and osprey. . . ."⁹⁵ Here the griffin "gryphen" is included in a list of relatively ordinary creatures, and it might be assumed that some common species of bird is meant. The Glossa, in the thirteenth century, however, defines a griffin as a four-legged creature with head and wings similar to an eagle, the rest similar to a lion. They live in the Hyperborean mountains and are dangerous to men and horses. Hugh of St. Cher's note is the same.⁹⁶ Whatever the original meaning, in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century interpretation the prohibition was against the classically defined monster.

This example, however helpful in establishing the monster's credibility, is little help in understanding the medieval symbolization of monsters. A reference to the siren in Isaiah illustrates more. The passage is one of many describing ruins and wastelands in terms of habitations of wild animals and monsters. The use of monsters in this context is effective and understandable. This particular passage reports that screech owls (glossed in some modern translations as hyenas) will answer in their sanctuaries and

⁹⁵ "Immundas ne comedatis: aquilam scilicet, et gryphon, et haliaetum . . ." (Deut. 14:11). All biblical quotations are from Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam, Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado (Matriti: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1959; rpt., 4th ed., 1965). The modern translation occasionally referred to is The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

⁹⁶ Glossa, I, 1540; Hugh, I, 160. The Glossa, of course, is a compilation of the works of many authors, some of whom wrote long before the thirteenth century, which we can safely take as a terminus ad quem.

sirens in the temples of desire.⁹⁷ The combination of siren and desire is an old and well-used one, and its occurrence in this descriptive passage comes as no surprise.⁹⁸ Hugh defines sirens as crested and winged serpents or fish with the faces of women and the power of the devil in seducing sailors. They are in temples, he explains, because a temple is a place where sin is most offensive to God. Further, the overall meaning is a description of flatterers in the homes of prelates.⁹⁹

Modern translations sometimes substitute jackal for siren, a favourite substitution for draco as well. Unicorns are often transformed into wild bulls. Such translations may have some authority from the Hebrew and may even be more effective for today's reader, but it is clear that the Middle Ages read and interpreted these animals as the monsters which were so abundant in their encyclopedias.

Another use of monsters to describe a wasteland is in a later book of Isaiah. "And demons will attack onocentaurs and one shaggy one will shout at another. There the lamia

⁹⁷ "Et respondebunt ibi ululae in aedibus eius,
Et sirenes in delubris voluptatis." (Is. 13:22)

⁹⁸ Alternatively, the fact that bestiaries and encyclopedias make this siren/desire connection is no surprise in view of the classical myth and biblical passages such as this one.

⁹⁹ Hugh, IV, 34-35.

slept and found a rest for herself."¹⁰⁰ The monsters in this passage are onocentauri, pilosus and lamia.

Hugh of St. Cher¹⁰¹ defines onocentaurs as part ass and part bull; pilosi are apes or demons or incubi or certain animals which stand on their two feet in the manner of men and defend themselves against hunters with rocks or a staff in their hands. The lamia is a kind of monster possessing horses' feet and other parts similar to women and are said to call boys at night.

The interpretation, then, is that the onocentaurs are the proud and base who are asses in the eyes of the Lord, but bulls in their own eyes, mighty, attacking in understanding, twisting, forcing. The pilosus (shaggy one) calling to another is one sinner summoning another to evil.

As is shown here, the composite monster is a particularly rich arena for the exegete. The bull/ass duality makes the onocentaur a fit and uniquely satisfying symbol for the complicated nature of the proud, and this is done without even exploiting the human/ass duality which is the usual composition of the monster.

¹⁰⁰ "Et occurrent daemonia onocentauris
Et pilosus clamabit alter ad alterum;
Ibi cubavit lamia,
Et invenit sibi requiem" (Is. 34:15).

¹⁰¹ Hugh, IV, 76.

Turning to the third monster mentioned, we find the lamia, an equally bizarre combination of animal and human parts. It is said to be treacherous to men, bred in Libya, with the head and breasts of a woman and the body of a four-footed animal with a flowing tail. Its hind feet have divided hooves and it is used as a "bugbear" to children.¹⁰²

Lamentations tells us that "even the lamiae bared their breasts and gave milk to their young, but the daughter of my people has grown cruel like the ostrich in the desert."¹⁰³ The lamia in this passage has been identified with the jackal in modern translations. Again, the notion of a heinous animal is not lost, but the special properties of the lamia were not wasted on the medieval commentators. Although we see that Hugh glosses the lamiae as priests of Judah, hypocrites, false prelates, demons and usurers, the Glossa explained that they are beasts with faces similar to women. They are heretics and hypocrites demonstrating prudence of flesh vs. prudence of spirit and the general hunger of the

¹⁰² See John Vinycomb, Fictitious and Symbolic Creatures in Art (London: Chapman and Hall, 1906), p. 220, and Bernheimer for discussions on this curious sea-witch creature who is often connected with the figure of Lilith. Its similarity to the Greek sphinx, as far as I have been able to tell, is coincidental.

¹⁰³ "Sed et lamiae nudaverunt mammam,
Lactaverunt catulos suos;
Filia populi mei crudelis
Quasi struthio in deserto" (Lam. 4:3).

people.¹⁰⁴ Left unmentioned by these two sources is the appropriateness of the lamia in the sense that if even the lamia, known for its cruelty to children, gives suck to its own, then the "cruel daughter of my people" appears even more horrid. Perhaps by this time the lamia had lost some of its earlier properties, or the commentators thought the connection too commonplace for explanation.

Such piecemeal references, especially with interpretations drawn from so late in the Middle Ages, do not provide us with a clear view of the monster as symbol operating in this type of writing. The more frequent occurrence of the unicorn, however, and the attention given it by the exegetes renders it an excellent example in this study.

As early as the fifth-century commentary of Augustine, we find the unicorn an established symbol. Regarding the passage "And my horn will be exalted just as the unicorn,"¹⁰⁵ Augustine writes that sometimes the unicorn signifies pride, sometimes the exalting of the unity, since when the unity is exalted all heresies along with the enemies of God will perish.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Glossa, IV, 196; Hugh, IV, 303.

¹⁰⁵ "Et exaltabitur sicut unicornis cornu meum,
Et senectus mea in misericordia uberi"
(Ps. 91(92):11).

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, P.L. 37:1178.

In the commentary doubtfully ascribed to Bede we find the horn signifying one's merit which will be raised like the unicorn because one believes in one Christ and one hope for things to come. The Glossa repeats Augustine's exegesis. Further, Hugh's thirteenth-century interpretation equates the unicorn with Christ and by horn we should understand that he was made flesh and he uses this horn against his enemies like the unicorn. This may refer to the traditional enmity between the unicorn (rhinoceros) and elephant in the earlier encyclopedia entries.¹⁰⁷

A second passage continues these contradictory interpretations. "And the Lord built his sanctuary just as one of unicorns, in the land which he founded forever."¹⁰⁸ Augustine sees the unicorns as those who have a firm faith in the one thing raised up. Pseudo-Bede is more expansive. The temple is so clean that it can house unicorns who are the purest of animals and have the cleanest habitats and can only be caught by virgins. The holy sanctuary is Christ and it houses those who have one faith (hence one horn). Again, the Glossa quotes Augustine. Hugh attributes the mention of unicorns to the fact that when they make their abode, like

¹⁰⁷ Bede, P.L. 93:980; Glossa, III, 1160; Hugh, II, 245r.

¹⁰⁸ "Et aedificavit sicut unicornium sanctificium suum, In terra quam fundavit in saecula". (Ps. 77(78):69).

the worm in his hole, they zealously prohibit the approach of strange animals.¹⁰⁹

Psalm 21(22):22, "Save me from the mouth of the lion and my humility from the horns of unicorns"¹¹⁰ is interpreted by Pseudo-Bede to mean save me from horns (pride and arrogance) of unicorns (Jews), because Jews believe in only one testament and one earthly promise. Yet Hugh, commenting on the same passage, maintains that the unicorn strikes and impales with its horn just as the devil strikes and impales sinners in hell. The devil, therefore, is a dog in his temptation, a lion in his perpetration of sin and a unicorn in his doling out of punishment.¹¹¹

Gregory, in discussing Job,¹¹² also remarks that the rhinoceros is of an untamed nature and will die if taken. Its name means "horn on the nostril," and what else is designated by the nostril but folly, what by the horn but

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, P.L. 36:1006; Bede, P.L. 93:909; Glossa, III, 1036-37; Hugh, II, 208.

¹¹⁰ "Salva me ex ore leonis,
Et a cornibus unicornium humilitatem meam"
(Ps. 21(22):22).

¹¹¹ Bede, P.L. 93:596; Hugh, II, 51.

¹¹² "Numquid volet rhinoceros servire tibi,
Aut morabitur ad praesepe tuum?
Numquid alligabis rhinocerotam ad arandum loro tuo
Aut confringet glebas vallium post te?"
(Job 39:9-10).

pride? Hugh, some six centuries later, becomes even more explicit. The rhinoceros, that is, the unicorn, cannot be captured by violence but only by a virgin in whose lap the unicorn lays its head and is thus mollified. Moreover, it kills the elephant by piercing it with its horn. This signifies the powerfu~~l~~ of this age who cannot be dominated. The horn on the nose is the elevation of folly.¹¹³

In describing Joseph, Deuteronomy compares his "horns" to those of the rhinoceros.¹¹⁴ Hugh equates the rhinoceros with Christ. This interpretation, the most common, is derived in various ways. Jacob's fortitude is described (Numbers 23:22) as similar to the rhinoceros'.¹¹⁵ Hugh comments that the glory of Christ who leads Israel from Egypt, is like the glory of the unicorn or rhinoceros, for just as the rhinoceros has only one horn and thus is called a unicorn, so Christ has only one kingdom which is signified by the single horn.¹¹⁶

Isaiah's poetic depiction of the wrath of the Lord

¹¹³ Gregory, P.L. 76:571-72; Hugh, I, 453.

¹¹⁴ "Quasi primogeniti tauri pulchritudo eius,
Cornua rhinocerotis cornua illius" (Deut. 33:17).

¹¹⁵ "Deus eduxit illum de Aegypto
Cuius fortitudo similis est rhinocerotis"
(Num. 23:22).

¹¹⁶ Hugh, I, 143, 177.

includes a line about unicorns descending into the slaughter with bulls and the earth will be drunk with their blood.¹¹⁷

Unicorns in this passage, Hugh glosses, refer to Romans or Assyrians holding earthly kingdoms. He once again connects the beast with the proud of the world.¹¹⁸

On the one hand the unicorn represents: (1) pride, (2) the Jews, (3) the Romans or Assyrians and (4) the devil. Conversely, it is a symbol of: (1) purity, (2) unity, (3) one's merit, (4) the faithful and (5) Christ. As mentioned above, the standard bestiary entry focuses on the Christ interpretation. Still, this collation of symbolic uses of the unicorn, both in bestiaries and exegesis, demonstrates a key point in any study of medieval monsters and will be especially integral to the study of dragons.

Monsters are so peculiarly equipped that their appearance in literature and art more often than not invites a variety of interpretations. Animals throughout the ages have been symbols for disparate concepts,¹¹⁹ and monsters, by virtue of their composite natures, provide an even richer field for

¹¹⁷ "Et descendent unicornes cum eius,
Et tauri cum potentibus;
Inebriabitur terra eorum sanguine,
Et humus eorum adipe pinguium" (Is. 34:7).

¹¹⁸ Hugh, IV, 75.

¹¹⁹ See Francis Donald Klingender, Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages, ed. Evelyn Antal and John Hartham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

the medieval writer.

The medieval monster, then, has a place in literature and art as an animal and often based on the specific attributes assigned to the beast in these occurrences, it will be used as a symbol, with an array of possible meanings. Yet a third possibility exists and we turn to that one now.

D. Monsters as Signs

My purpose thus far has been, initially, to establish the medieval monster as a legitimate entity in the medieval man's perception of his natural universe. From that point, one which today is more easily expressed than comprehended with a consistency vital to a true appreciation of the medieval perspective, I have then asserted that the monster can have a strong Christian literary tradition. This often associates it with an increasingly standardized body of historical racial groups, personalities and consequently abstract principles derived quite cleverly from the physical attributes or fabulous customs of the creature.

Unfortunately, for all the agreement one might find in the above observations, literary scholars can be found who repeatedly reduce a symbolic monster to the third interpretive level, that of sign. As a sign, or an equation with something else, the monster has a precise purpose in medieval art and writing. Yet under the name of symbol, many occurrences

of monsters are dealt with in just this perfunctory manner.

This inability to recognise the complexity and richness of the monster motif is not entirely caused by the prejudices mentioned in the first chapter. Our own scientific literal-minded perception of essences, in the expression of which the range of poetic freedom rarely surpasses the relatively narrow bounds of the fundamental metaphor, has infinite difficulty in accepting the structured, persistent analogy of the elaborate medieval allegory. Our aesthetic judgment is offended by what appears to be a simplistic matrix of equations. Appreciation rarely is found in the two-way flow of intrinsic meanings which illumines both elements of the analogy and which is inherent in the very basic comparison mode of expression.

This is not to say that monsters are always nicely positioned in well-structured allegories. On the contrary, they can be found cumbersomely attached to various genres almost as if they were the zoomorphic dragon head automatically expected at the end of a serpentine ribbon in the margin of a manuscript. In these instances, common in saints' lives, they often are signs.

Further, monsters appear in rambling romances with very little or no relation to the highly stylized medieval allegory. The point here is that in reading this literature we are in the presence of writers who, if not directly involved in, are forerunners or frequent readers of a mode of expression

which makes symbolization an integral factor in perception, not a stylistic extravagance. We are amateurs in comparison.

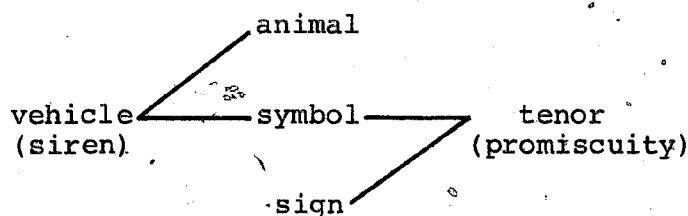
The true signal monsters, however, are plentiful and easy to discern. In this survey of monster traditions in the Middle Ages, I have deliberately avoided strictly literary trends. The genres considered thus far (with the exception of the fable) are more properly natural history, travel accounts, theological writings and combinations of these which we find in the bestiary. This is meant to provide a solid grasp of the influences on the medieval writer of literature, especially the vernacular writer. Only after we can perceive the monster's position in general medieval thought can we attempt to judge its value in a contrived artistic narrative.¹²⁰

Similarly, it is most expedient to present evidence of the monster as sign from such writings. Consideration of the specifically literary occurrences of the signal monster as portents or dreams will be more useful when addressing individual English works.

The monster as sign in the genres already examined is evident when the entire symbolizing process becomes so fixed

¹²⁰ Once again, the medieval genres were not so rigidly disparate that this statement can stand unqualified. The writer of the bestiary at times approaches creative expression which puts little room between him and the author of one of the less original saints' lives.

that a particular monster becomes a signpost for the specific concept. This is a matter of degree in the sense that a symbol becomes "limited" to a sign. For example, sirens, after their consistent interpretation in exegesis and bestiary, become signs for promiscuity. Their meaning is fixed. Yet, transformation from symbol to sign is not complete until the sign becomes mostly meaning and less of an actual entity in the text. Using the vocabulary of the metaphor we see the distinctions more clearly:



The interpretive levels of animal and symbol are present when the vehicle is operating as itself within the text. The interpretive levels of symbol and sign are present when the tenor gains importance. In a strict sense, a sign naturally is composed of vehicle and tenor, but the diagram hopes to emphasize the overwhelming aspect of the tenor in these levels. The sign is much akin to an involved allusion. All these distinctions, seemingly trivial in the genres of encyclopedia, bestiary and exegesis, guide the proper analysis of the monster in imaginative secular literature.

The meaning of animals (gleaned from the above genres)

has become a popular pursuit of some modern writers.¹²¹

Examples of the most common or intriguing equations (by no means the only ones) respecting monsters follow:

1. basilisk = devil, antichrist, concupiscence
2. chimaera = description of mountain or grades of love
3. catoblepas = concupiscence of eyes
4. centaur = evil nature, men who have two tongues
5. griffin = ferocity of persecutors and passion of pride
6. hydrus = Christ descending into hell
7. lamia = falseness
8. corocrote (leucrote?) = student in arts not wise in what he reads
9. onocentaur = luxury
10. phoenix = Christ, 2 wings = Old and New Testaments
11. sirens = heretics
12. sphinx (Greek) = violent destruction¹²²

¹²¹ See Vinycomb's Fictitious and Symbolic Creatures, and Beryl Rowland's Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973; rpt. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974).

¹²² (1) Hrabanus Maurus, Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam, in Migne, P.L., 112:874, 1039; (2) (Vatican Mythographers), Georg Heinrich Bode, ed., Scriptores, III, 14.5; (3) Thomas de Cantimpré, 4.28; (4) Gervaise, ll. 329-45; (5) Hrabanus Maurus, De universo, 8.1(222); (6) Carmody, Physiologus, p. 35; (7) Hrabanus, Allegoriae, col. 979; (8) Thomas de Cantimpré, 4.27; Thomas is here referring to a creature that never closes its eyes and is conceived from a dog and a wolf; (9) Hrabanus, Allegoriae, cols. 1011-12; (10) Philippe de Thaon, ll. 2217-1322; (11) Hrabanus, Allegoriae, col. 1057; (12) Lum, p. 215, but he gives no primary source.

Monsters as Signs in Art--Heraldry

The emergence of heraldry is a large and complex phenomenon which we can only touch on here. Thought to have developed from seals of the early twelfth century, these elaborate systems of symbolic badges were used to represent both a knightly class and a particular noble family. "Thus purely personal badges, such as Beowulf's boar-crest, came to assume the function of hereditary group-symbols analogous, in certain respects, to the ancient totem badges from which they ultimately derive."¹²³

Although many occurrences of animal art might evoke totemistic interpretation, heraldry naturally would be strongly associated with this more primitive perception of man in his world. The representation of a family or class or city or nation by an animal (very often found in heraldry) is a clear example of a popularized sign. In an age when symbolization was so revered and could be so uniformly enforced, it was only a matter of time until these signs became associated with sections of society. This link between literature and art is attested to in the early treatises on heraldry where the heraldic motifs were consciously borrowed from the animal entries in encyclopedias

¹²³ Klingender, p. 451.

and bestiaries.¹²⁴

Further, instead of rejecting the monster as an object of emulation (logically, disassociation with the physically grotesque or morally base creature being understandable), we find that the monster not only held its own but flourished in heraldry. Most of the popular medieval monsters appear either on the shields themselves or as supporters in coats of arms. More interestingly, we discover ordinary animals with characteristics more monstrous, as in the representation of the heraldic antelope. A creature distinct from its counterpart in nature, the heraldic antelope has "a body like that of a stag, the tail of a unicorn, a head like the heraldic tiger, with two serrated horns, and a tusk growing from the tip of his nose, a row of tufts down the back of his neck, and the like on his tail, chest and thighs."¹²⁵

Such distortion has three possible explanations: (1) As we have seen, knowledge of foreign beasts was often imperfect and the artist could be following a mistaken encyclopedia entry. (2) The artist "intended to typify certain extra-

¹²⁴ "When the need arose to standardize the badges used by noble families throughout Europe, and heralds turned their art into a system, they found the elements for a new mythology ready to hand in the bestiaries and in the chapters on animals in scholastic encyclopedias" (Klingender, p. 452). Refer to this and following pages for specific heraldic treatises.

¹²⁵ Vinycomb, p. 213.

ordinary qualities, and therefore exaggeration of the natural shapes and functions was needful to express such qualities."¹²⁶ (3) Some forms are pure heraldic inventions contrived to combine specific qualities.

Besides the standard body of medieval monsters and the more monstrous representations of natural creatures, we find a plethora of obscure monsters precisely named and described (as was essential for official heraldic use). Monstrous in form or fable are the apres, bagwyn, baphomet, camelopard, enfield, lion-dragon, hippocampus, ibex, lamia or emipusa, liver, musimon and an array of sea-dogs, (-bulls, -wolves, -bears, -cats, -dragons, -sirens. Many of these creatures relate almost directly to non-monstrous beasts. The camelopard is a giraffe; the hippocampus is a sea-horse. The enthusiasm of the heraldic artist produced their monstrous forms. The majority of these are quite rare in British or Continental Armoury but do appear in official treatises. The German Armoury boasts a greater number of grotesques, and, in general, monsters appear more often as supporters in England than as actual charges.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹²⁷ John Woodward and George Burnett, A Treatise on Heraldry, British and Foreign, with English and French glossaries, intro. L. G. Pine (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1969), pp. 286-304.

In this highly stylized art we once again encounter the now familiar band of medieval monsters:¹²⁸

1. The griffin (gryphon) is the most frequent monster in British heraldry.¹²⁹ It was adopted early and possesses its own attitude--segreant--similar to the rampant position, with wings expanded. It represents strength and vigilance, not surprising in light of Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor's claim (III, 4(84)) that the griffin (from the Persian word girifen --corresponding to the Greek γρούψ -ος, ὀ--means to gripe or seize)¹³⁰ picks up whole men and transports them to its nest. Also compare Aelianus, IV, 27, where the griffin is characterized as a guardian of gold hoarded in its nest. Inexplicably, sans wings denotes a male griffin.

2. Armorial rules clearly distinguish between cockatrice and amphisbaena. The Amphysian cockatrice (amphisbaena) has a dragon's head on its tail like the amphisbaena in literature. Unfortunately, both this and the cock-dragon creature called the cockatrice are referred to as basilisk and the confusion persists. An especially effective banner

¹²⁸ The dragon in heraldry will be discussed in a later chapter.

¹²⁹ See below, p. 225, for the very ancient occurrences of this creature which captures the imagination of artists across the globe.

¹³⁰ Etymology is from a Ktesias fragment found in Photios. See McCrindle, Ktesias, p. 17.

figure, the basilisk kills enemies on sight.¹³¹

3. The centaur with bow and arrow represented formidable archers or was a symbol of the chase.¹³²

4. The chimaera, rare abroad, is not used in British coat armour but was once used as a device (pictured battling Bellerophon) representing the English heresies that Philip II of Spain planned to conquer.¹³³

5. The harpy, known for its fierceness, can be found as a supporter.

6. The hydra, in heraldry seven-headed, represents fierceness as well. It also denotes watchfulness. (Cf. the Lernean hydra.)

7. The mantichore or satyr (man-eating opponent) appears as a supporter.

8. Naval heroes use Triton or mermen or mermaids to represent their prowess on the sea.

9. The phoenix, rising from its flames, was employed for many historical personalities. The mottoes which accompany the devices, medals and badges explain the symbolism:

Joan of Arc--"Her death itself will make her live"

Mary Queen of Scots--"My end is my beginning"

Jane Seymour--"That another may be born"

Elizabeth I--"Always the same," or "The sole phoenix of the world and the glory of England" (next to her portrait).¹³⁴

¹³¹ See Pliny, 8, 78.

¹³² Vinycomb, pp. 142-43.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 103.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 174-78.

10. The salamander, also in flames, signified "brave and generous courage that the fire of affliction cannot destroy or consume."¹³⁵

11. The sphynx usually represents some service in Egypt.

12. The unicorn, extremely popular as crest or supporter, signified virtue of mind and strength of body. Its medicinal horn made it an apt emblem for apothecaries and chemists.¹³⁶

What does this list tell us? Compared to the one on p. 106 we can see interesting discrepancies in how monsters were used as signs in the Middle Ages. The predominantly Christian symbolization is lost in heraldry. We find that the monsters are once again signs of some extravagant attribute of an animal in the natural world. Note that they do not function as animals in any narrative sense, but their signal qualities are extracted more directly from their animal nature. The basilisk, because of its deadly look, became the antichrist in many texts. In heraldic art, we return to its original meaning. The centaur, degenerated into the sign for man's evil nature, becomes the famed archer again. The griffin, connoting ferocity of persecutors and

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 127-36. See Aelian, III, 41, for an account of the horn's antidotal power against poison.

passion of pride returns to its position of strength and vigilance.

In light of these interpretations, the abundance of monsters is understandable. In the situation where the interpretation was flattering in the Christian context, as the unicorn or phoenix (representing Christ), we find that heraldry secularized these creatures as well by drawing from their original attributes without losing the positive effect of the sign.

In order to avoid misleading the reader with terms like "returns" or "becomes again," I must add that these varying signal interpretations were often simultaneously offered. The griffin, depending on the context, was seen as both vigilance and pride. The emphasis here is on the quality and roots of the interpretation.

Even when used on a level as apparently simplistic as sign, and in genres relatively straightforward, we find the medieval monster imbued with traditions which place a great responsibility on the interpreter. When a monster, then, is found in the more fictive arts, an interpreter's reliance on only one tradition can become very dangerous.

This chapter has outlined the significant aspects of the total medieval monster tradition. The dragon was very much a part of this tradition (or more properly traditions) and its development will now be traced in detail.

III

THE DRAGON IN THE MIDDLE AGES

A. The Dragon as Animal

Examination of the traditions discussed in the previous chapter would hardly be complete without giving attention to one of the monsters prominent in both literature and art of the time. In my introductory chapter I sought to establish an interpretive level of the dragon-as-animal by analyzing material from four influential encyclopedists: Pliny, Solinus, Aelian and Isidore. This rudimentary handling of the dragon-as-animal must now be expanded.

Dragons do not suddenly make their appearance in this tradition in Pliny, but can be seen to have their roots in the Arabian winged snakes discussed by Herodotus (πτερωτων ὄφτων, II, 75). Also note his description of small winged serpents who guard spice-bearing trees (III, 107-9), echoing the guardian-dragon motif popular in mythology. Interesting as well is Ktesias' account of the capture of giant worms seven cubits long with two teeth who spend the daytime at the bottom of the river, emerging at night to consume a cow or camel. The worm is caught on a large hook baited with a kid or lamb and then is hung for thirty days to produce a

potent variety of oil.¹ Possibly a crocodile, this worm has the dragon-like habit of slipping out of the sea to capture its prey. In addition, Megasthenes' *Tá Tvδávd* mentions small winged serpents, two cubits long, who drop beads of urine or sweat on men below, causing their skin to blister.²

Accounts of giant serpents in the East were plentiful and understandable considering the larger species prevalent in the non-European climates of the Middle East and Africa. Certain descriptions, however, are clearly indicative of a dragon-like creature. One such occurrence is in Lucan's Pharsalia in a passage concerning Cato's trip to Libya.

You dragons shine with golden brightness. You who crawl in other lands [the East], as innoxious divinities, burning Africa [Libya] renders deadly. You fly through the air on wings, follow whole herds, having embraced them, break asunder huge bulls with a stroke. There is no safe place for the elephant. You kill all and have no need of venom.³

This poetic description of the draco is an illuminating example of the development of the dragon tradition. Here

¹ McCrindle, Ktesias, p. 28, from Photios fragment.

² McCrindle, Megasthenes, p. 54, from Strabo fragment.

³ "uos quoque, qui cunctis innoxia numina terris
serpitis, aurato nitidi fulgore dracones,
pestiferos ardens facit Africa; ducitis altum
aera cum pennis, armentaque tota secuti
rumpitis ingentes amplexi uerbere tauros.
nec tutus spatium est elephas: datis omnia leto:
nec uobis opus est ad noxia fata veneno"
(Lucan, IX, 726-45).

the giant serpents of the eastern travel accounts are delineated in a way which reflects the influence of the mythological creature.⁴ Lucan's verse lends itself to this. The dragon now boasts a golden brightness and has clearly-defined functional wings. Pliny's slightly later work is obscure on the subject of wings and omits mention of colour. Still, he confirms the elephant feud and the absence of venom as does Isidore.

After the seventh-century Etymologiae of Isidore we are once again in that nebulous range of centuries which produced the Old English Letter of Alexander and the Wonders of the East. The Letter's army of serpents is of some interest here. Alexander's men fought against many kinds of coloured wyrma and nædre, and horned serpents, losing many men to them. The serpents come in waves, some with their scales shining gold, some with two or three heads and some as large as columns.⁵

⁴ See next chapter for specific characteristics of the dragon in myth.

⁵ "Ða toforan monan upgon
ge þa cwomon þær scorpiones þ̅ wyrmcyn
swa hie ær gewunlice wæron þæs wæter
sciepes . wæs þara wyrma micel mænegeo
& heora wæs unrim & hie swiðe on þa ure wic
onetton & in þa feollon . þa æfter þon cwo
man þær hornede nædran carastis þ̅
nædercyn . þa wæron ealle missenlices
hiwes sumum þonne
scinan þa scilla & lixtan swylce hie
wæron gyldne . . . þa cwoman þær nædran eft
wunderlicran þonne ða opre wæron & eges
licran . þa hæfdon tu heafdo & eac sume hæf

Cerberus, strong in its mythological context, does not enter the world of monster-as-animal in the same way as the hydra.⁹ Contrary to some hydra entries (these Old English ones, for example), Cerberus is always an individual, not a species of creatures. The same may be said for the monster labelled hydra, and yet a monster with its attributes often appears --not so named--in texts.¹⁰

The horned nædran who kill anyone who touches them sound suspiciously like basilisks. This characteristic is likewise attached to hen-like animals mentioned earlier in the work whose touch causes the body to burn up.¹¹ The demarcation between dragon and serpent becomes almost impossible to inflict on these borderline descriptions, especially when the author does not feel obliged to render dragons as dracan instead of nædran (as in the Wonders of the East), or serpents

⁹ The Cerberus entry in the Liber Monstrorum (II, 15; Haupt, p. 241) simply repeats the classical myth of the guardian of the underworld.

¹⁰ Cf. the three-headed dragon in the Celtic folktale of The Grey Lad (in Campbell) and the seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse.

¹¹ "Sum stow is mon fereð to
 þære readan sê seo is
 haten lentibelsinea þam
 beoð henna acenned onlice
 þonne þe mid us beoð reades
 heowes · gif hi hwylc man niman wile oppe him o
 æthrineð þonne forbærnað hy sona eal his
 lîc þ̅ syndon ungefrægelicu liblac"
 (fol. 99(98)/6-13, Rypins, p. 52).

as serpentes instead of dracones (as is evident in Pliny). Yet there is a definite progressive history of fabulous attributes assigned to serpentine creatures.

Continuing in this line, then, we can isolate numerous dragon attributes in the Liber Monstrorum.¹² The twenty-five serpent entries comprising the third book include several noteworthy passages. Five entries (1, 2, 3, 7, 24) refer to multi-headed hydra-type serpents.¹³ Two of these are also described as giant (2, 7) along with seven additional entries of serpents with immensa corporis volumina, mirae or horrendae magnitudinis, columnarum crassitudine (cf. the Letter and Wonders of the East), vasta corporis mole, or simply prodigii.¹⁴ Of the remaining thirteen entries one

¹² The word draco, however, is used only in three places in the text, in the introduction, when the author is distinguishing between the three different kinds of monsters: "ut de monstrosis hominum partibus describerem et de ferarum horribilibus numerosisque bestiarum formis et draconum diris-simis serpentiumque ac viperarum generibus" (I, 1); in the description of the dracontopods: "Ferunt fabulae Graecorum homines immenses corporibus fuisse et in tanta mole tamen humano generi similes, nisi quod draconum caudas habuerunt, unde et Graece dracontopodes dicebantur" (I, 49); and in the chelydrus entry: "et rex Aeeta, quem superius descripsimus, pater Medae virginis, more serpentis tales habuisse dentes describitur, ut siquis eos simul comprehensos sevisset, inde armati prosilirent homines ad interfectionem saevientes, sed quidam draconis dentes fuisse arbitrantur" (III, 16).

¹³ (1) the Lernean hydra; (2) two-headed Assyrian serpents; (3) Euridice's hydra; (7) two-, three-headed Indian serpents; (24) fifty-headed hydra of Tartarus.

¹⁴ (4) India--Alexander reference; (5) Calabria--Augustus reference; (9) Africa--Roman army; (11) India--Alexander reference; (12) Tyrrhenian Sea; (13) River Styx; (19) India.

can find the horned pepper-guarding serpents traceable to Herodotus (6), other horned serpents, the Cerastes (15), the viper which is similar to a human down to the navel (18),¹⁵ a variety of species, including the regulus (basilisk) (25), along with the traditional salamander (14), and hydrus (21), and a number of serpents from history or myth.

At this point in history, roughly 1000 A.D., we might validly generalize about the medieval conception of species of serpents which have, in retrospect, dragon-like characteristics. From the evidence examined, we can speculate that, at least in far-off lands, the following unusual species can be found:

1. winged snakes
2. small winged snakes which guard spice trees
3. small winged snakes with sweat or urine which blisters skin
4. golden giant flying creatures that attack bulls from the air
5. multi-headed snakes
6. snakes lethal to the touch
7. snakes with human bodies to the navel
8. phenomenally large snakes

Many of these creatures may not have been universally accepted, and yet, as in the example of the Liber Monstrorum, we find the literature of the time displaying combinations of legend and fabulous travel accounts which made factual

¹⁵ Contrast a bestiary woodcut, figure 12. This description also fits the dracontopod (with the human part female) which is thought to be the form of the devil when tempting Eve, as is shown in many art representations.

natural history, at least for the draco, a thing of the past or future.

Augment the above list with Isidore's seventh-century dragon attributes:

1. larger than all serpents or anything living on earth
2. lives in caves and is borne in the air
3. stirs up (burns?) air around it
4. crested, small mouth, narrow gullet
5. kills with tail, not teeth
6. non-poisonous--suffocates victims
7. kills even elephants
8. lives in Ethiopia and India

We no longer should find the fabulous writings of the later medieval centuries (eager to incorporate knowledge from every possible source) at all surprising. The groundwork was laid over a millenium before, and as evidenced in Augustine's solution to the predicament of the cynocephali in his City of God,¹⁶ educated men could not afford to dismiss the possibility of dragon-like creatures.

With the coming of the great Latin encyclopedias of the thirteenth century, we observe that the dragon-as-animal has achieved a relatively consistent description and body of traditional information comprising the lengthy entry under the standard heading draco.¹⁷ Thomas de Cantimpré's Liber

¹⁶ See above, p. 41.

¹⁷ Honorius, in his De imagine mundi, however, only mentions 300-foot long snakes along the Ganges (I, 13(125)).

de natura rerum, itself dependent upon many authorities, is a good example of typical information known about the dragon in his time. His entry on draco (VIII, 16) begins with a variation of Isidore's description, with certain details expanded.

They are rarely found except in the warm parts of the earth. Very large dragons are said to inhabit the land around the tower of Babel and the tower itself, and in former times the deserts of Babylon and its ruins. Their voice and roaring terrifies men. Very often the dragon exceeds twenty cubits in length. The sight of the dragon is intolerable to men and sometimes is enough to kill them.¹⁸

A short passage on its scant nutritional needs is followed by a reference to Pope Sylvester's experience with a dragon in Rome and two dragons mentioned in British history. Then "Wherever it remains, it corrupts the air. It has no feet, and a certain genus crawls on its belly. There is a rare breed which does have feet."¹⁹

Next comes a passage concerning the dragon stone, found

¹⁸ "Raro enim inveniuntur nisi in partibus orbis calidioribus. Circa turrim Babel et in ipsa turri Babel et in deserta illius antique Babylonis et ruinis eius habitare dicuntur maximi dracones, quorum vox atque rugitus homines terret. Ad viginti et amplius cubitos crescens sepius evalescit. Visus eius intollerabilis est hominibus, ut etiam aliquando sola visione eius terreantur ad mortem" (Bk. 8, 16, ll. 11-16; p. 281).

¹⁹ "Ubicumque moratur, aerem inficit. Pedibus caret. Quoddam eorum genus est, quod pectore super terram repit. Aliud eorum genus est, quod pedes habet; sed istud rarius invenitur" (Bk. 8, 16, ll. 29-31; p. 282).

in the brain of the beast, how to procure it, and the exorcizing powers of the dragon's tongue and skin. Following this is a section describing the hunting of dragons (eaten in Ethiopia) by imitating the sound and sight of thunder and lightning to which the dragon is especially vulnerable.

Thomas, writing in the thirteenth century, has not only the benefit of the few extant works examined here and the unknown lost writings, but the popular picture-book bestiaries which will be discussed below. His additions should not be considered for originality at this time, but for what they can tell us about the thirteenth-century conception of the dragon. Besides the additions to physical detail, note the inclusion of references to authority from other literary genres. The ruins of Babylon are a typical biblical location for the dragon (see below, p. 168); Pope Sylvester's dragon is a standard part of his saint's life (below, p. 245, n.10); the two dragons mentioned in British history are those discovered by Merlin under Vortigern's tower in the histories which inspire Arthurian romance (below, pp. 260-62). The legend of the dragon's stone persisted throughout the Middle Ages in medical treatises. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the literary tradition of the creature without conflating genres which the Middle Ages did not regard as distinct.

Still, in establishing the dragon-as-animal, I do not

wish to overstress the gullibility of medieval thinkers. Albertus Magnus' De animalibus, probably written shortly after Thomas' work, reflects a much more conservative view of the dragon. He begins by quoting philosophers' descriptions of the draco, which is a genus of the third order of serpent containing many species. They have yellow and black faces and, according to Avicenna, have hair resembling a horse's mane. He goes on to say that if he reports the more vulgar writings of those such as Pliny and Solinus, then the descriptions would be as follows,²⁰ whereupon he lists characteristics and habits quite similar to Thomas', adding qualifications such as "this is hard to prove or believe." He ends with an interesting passage voicing disbelief in the dragon's ability to fly or to spew fire from its mouth, speculating that some might be confusing dragons with combustible vapours.²¹

²⁰ "Hoc est verius quod de draconibus ab expertis philosophorum invenitur. Si autem sequamur dicta eorum qui potius referunt audita vulgi, quam physica dictorum suorum ostendant experta tunc sequendo Plinium et Solinum et quosdam alios dicemus draconem esse maximum inter omnia terrae et . . ." (Bk. 25; 27; p. 1566).

²¹ "Quod autem dicitur videri dracones volantes in aëre qui exspirent ignem micantem, aput me impossibile est nisi sicut de vaporibus quibusdam in libro Metheororum est determinatum qui dracones vocantur. Illos enim expertum est in aëre incendi et moveri et fumare et aliquando conglobatos cadere in aquas et stridere sicut stridet candens ferrum, et aliquando iterum elevari ex aquis quando vapor ventosus est, et erumpere in aërem et comburere plantas et alia quae contingunt: et propter huiusmodi ascensum et descensum et fumum qui ex utraque parte caliginosus diffunditur in modum alarum,

Noteworthy here is that the bulk of Albert's entry is the material he wishes to debunk, making one wonder if he, like Bernard before him, cannot help being attracted to the monstrous. Even if his intention was merely to be thorough, the effect is the perpetuation of these details as can be seen in subsequent writers.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus offers the usual authorities and account, mentioning that dragons often connect their tails together and go looking for food in the sea. He also provides the customary reason for the dragon/elephant feud, that is, that the dragon wants to cool itself in the elephant's blood.²²

Also writing in the mid-thirteenth century, Vincent of Beauvais quotes many authorities, including the Avicenna description approved by Albert and a statement avowing the dragon's fear of the zilanin tree.²³ In the contemporary encyclopedia of Brunetto Latini, the traditional Isidore passage is used once again.²⁴

credunt imperiti hoc esse animal volans et spirans ignem"
(Bk. 25, 27; p. 1567).

²² Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Bk. 18, p. 1053.

²³ Vincent of Beauvais, Bk. 20, 29-33 (pp. 1476-79). Cf. the zilanin tree to the peredixion tree of the bestiaries, below, p. 139.

²⁴ Brunetto Latini, Bk. I, 141.

These samples provide a solid understanding of the dragon-as-animal. Curiously enough, we now return to travel accounts dating almost a thousand years after the original winged snakes of Herodotus to see yet one more development in this area.

Marco Polo's Milione marks a high point in a new wave of travel accounts which began again in the twelfth century. Although Marco Polo did not write till nearly the end of the thirteenth century, his basically factual work did include some fabulous elements which by that time readers expected of accounts of the East.

He refers at one point to giant serpents found in Carajan, ten paces long and two wide, having legs with claws and capable of swallowing a man whole. The gall is used to cure mad dog bites and its flesh is sold and eaten.²⁵ The crocodile-like creature is very similar to Ktesias' giant worm.

The most outstanding of Milione's fabulous elements²⁶ is the passage concerning the legendary Prester John (pp. 78ff.). A fascinating subject himself,²⁷ the mysterious

²⁵ Marco Polo, see Benedetto, p. 189.

²⁶ His story that natives manufacture pygmies from monkeys is also notable (Benedetto, p. 283).

²⁷ A concise introduction to the subject, and a good bibliography, can be found in Igor de Rachewiltz, Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia, 32nd George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology, 1971 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972).

Christian emperor Prester John was thought to rule his fantastic kingdom in the far east until, like the marvels, his location was switched to Africa after more accurate eastern accounts became known. Although Marco Polo's work does not mention dragons in Prester John's kingdom, and the famous mid-twelfth-century fabricated letter addressed to various Christian kings, especially to Emperor Manuel of Constantinople (1143-80) who forwarded it to the Roman Emperor Frederick I, Barbarossa (1152-90) does not in its earliest versions mention dragons,²⁸ many of the numerous interpolations of the letter in later centuries assert a number of monsters, including dragons.

In a chapter in Robert Silverberg's book on the subject, entitled "Embellishments and Fantasies," one reads that "Also interpolated in the fourteenth century were men who tamed flying dragons by incantations, saddled and bridled them, and rode them through the air."²⁹

Marco Polo's work helped substantiate Prester John's existence and what began as a fictional realm (perhaps even as a joke) became more and more fantastic, with little effort made over the centuries to control the marvellous elements.

²⁸ See Vsevolod Slessarev, Prester John: The Letter and the Legend (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959) for a discussion of the manuscript tradition and a translation of an early form of the letter.

²⁹ Silverberg, pp. 144-45.

Indeed, travellers like the fourteenth-century Dominican missionary from France, Jordanus of Sévérac, would be instrumental in perpetuating the connection between this widely accepted ruler and dragons:

Of India Tertia I will say this, that I have not indeed seen its many marvels, not having been there, but have heard them from trustworthy persons. For example, there be dragons in the greatest abundance, which carry on their heads the lustrous stones which be carbuncles. These animals have their lying-place upon golden sands, and grow exceedingly big, and cast forth from the mouth a most fetid and infectious breath like the thickest smoke rising from fire. These animals come together at the destined time, develop wings and begin to raise themselves in the air, and then, by the judgment of God, being too heavy, they drop into a certain river which issues from Paradise, and perish there.

But all regions about watch for the time of the dragons, and when they see one that has fallen, they wait for seventy days, and then go down and find the bare bones of the dragon, and take the carbuncle which is rooted in the top of his head, and carry it to the emperor of the Ethiopians, whom you call Prester John.³⁰

Prester John and the dragons of his kingdom find their way into the work of another mythical individual--John Mandeville. The Cotton Version of Mandeville's Travels, a conflated translation from the French of about 1400,³¹ mentions "grete dragouns" in Prester John's kingdom (216/3), "dragouns"

³⁰ Jordanus of Sévérac, The Wonders of the East, trans. Henry Yule (London: Hakluyt Society, 1863), quoted in Silverberg, p. 166. I have been unable to consult an edition of the text.

³¹ Ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

in other areas (28/15) and on the isle of Silha "fulle of serpentes, of dragouns, and of cokadrilles . . . no man dwell there . . ." (144/27).

Also in this version is the sad story of the daughter of Ypocras on the Isle of Cos who was turned into a dragon by the goddess "Deane." She waited with her treasure in a castle built in a cave for a knight to kiss her and change her back to a woman. Mandeville relates one of her unsuccessful attempts to seduce a knight, ending with a tear in the dragon's eye and the terrorized knight sailing away (15/18). A mundane explanation for this conflation of romance, folklore and travel motifs is that the dragon is a misconstruction of Draco, the son of Hippocrates.

Mandeville's two uses of the dragon vividly illustrate the existence of the dragon-as-animal level of interpretation as opposed to the dragon-as-symbol level which may be operating in the story of the transformed woman. In Mandeville's borrowed piecemeal account, one cannot hope to appreciate much more than the story itself, except perhaps to succumb to the temptation of acknowledging the appropriateness of a physical transformation to represent a semantic/semiotic one.

Representations of the dragon in the plastic arts of the long period termed the Middle Ages were abundant and cannot be handled in a comprehensive manner here. For the complicated pictorial tradition of manuscript illuminations

of much marvellous material, I once again refer the reader to Wittkower's informative articles.³² For illustrations of dragon representations across the world, spanning diverse civilizations, a number of works has recently become available.³³

Some visual material, however, can aid in a further clarification and demonstration of the distinctions of interpretive levels which have been propounded throughout this study. The earliest representations of the creature had their origins in Mesopotamia (see below, p. 225). These portrayals sometimes had the head of a snake or wolf-like being with large teeth and the extremities of a lion or eagle. The Ishtar Gate, once an entrance to a part of the city of Babylon, shows an animal identified as the dragon Musrussu. The creature has the shape of a dog with a serpent's head and tail, two lion's feet and two eagle's feet. Many such unusual representations of the dragon can be found. I will confine my discussion, however, to examples which, through some aspect, help illustrate the medieval perception

³² Wittkower, "Marvels of the East," and "Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East," Allegory and the Migration of Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 45-92.

³³ See Peter Hogarth and Val Clery, Dragons (New York: Viking Press, 1979); Judy Allen and Jeanne Griffiths, The Book of the Dragon (Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books, 1979); Francis Huxley, The Dragon (New York: Collier Books, 1979).

of the dragon.

Figure 7 is from a late fourteenth-century copy of Livres des merveilles, a collection of travel accounts made for Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.³⁴ The present detailed illustration shows such creatures as Marco Polo was presumed to have encountered. The problem with the illustration is that Marco Polo never records such wondrous beasts as figure 7 represents. Of the more prominent creatures in the illustration, the weasel/dragon in the lower left corresponds to no such animal mentioned by Marco Polo (cf. Appendix 5), nor does the winged beast with serpent's head on its tail so carefully drawn on the right.³⁵ Even the more conventional dragon/amphisbaena figure in the centre with fowl's feet, expressive red head, brown wings endorsed and bright green neck, back and tail must be taken to be an exaggeration of the explorer's giant clawed snake/crocodile. These discrepancies between text and illustration are well-documented by Wittkower, who adds that

no medieval artist aimed at a descriptive illustration of a text. As a rule he addressed his public through exemplars, models which circumscribed or contained in a single picture a whole complex of notions and ideas; and it is the strength of the medieval position that these pictorial exemplars were subject to only very slow changes. Being accustomed to the visual language

³⁴ Figure 7 is taken from Allen, p. 79.

of exemplars fixed by long tradition, the medieval reader on his side did not expect a literal text illustration, but rather visual clarification in terms familiar to him.³⁵

Although this phenomenon could be viewed in terms of a misrepresentation of a more sophisticated text by the presence of inordinately traditional, slightly stagnant illustrations, Wittkower's point is that the same evidence could also be used to demonstrate the importance of an accepted pool of monstrous creatures which created and sustained these exemplars. The similarity of design in the animal representations found in the bestiaries (see figures 10 and 11) demonstrates the influence of an exemplar within the genre. These illustrations will be discussed below. At this juncture, note that figure 10 shows drawings of six creatures labelled in the text as dragon, scitalis, amphisbena, boa, viper and siren snake all copied from a single manuscript. With the exception of the viper which has no wings and the amphisbena which has its characteristic second head on the end of its tail, the creatures would be difficult to identify or distinguish between based on these illustrations. The asp drawing in figure 11, which is a collection of drawings copied from various manuscripts, displays the same body shape and wings as does the amphisbena drawing beside it. Comparison

³⁵ Wittkower, "Marco Polo," in Allegory, p. 86, originally published in Oriente Poliano. (Rome, 1957).

of figures 9 and 12, a fable and a bestiary illustration, however, strongly suggests the existence of accepted pictorial models which affected different literary traditions. With these examples alone, one might surmise that this is representative of a pictorial tradition only, but in view of the extensive texts expounding on monsters, one must conclude the existence of dragon-as-animal in medieval perception.

This is indicated even more definitively in the extant world maps of the period. Dragons of some form can be found pictured on all of the six zoogeographical regions of the world--Neotropical (North America), Neartic (South America), Ethiopian, Oriental, Palearctic (Eurasia) and Australian.³⁶ Figure 8 is a detail from one of these maps, dated 1457.³⁷ The dragon, situated in Ethiopia, has a red face and horns and unusually formed red wings which sit much like a small mountain on the back of the pale green reptile. Although the ill-formed camel next to the creature suggests a careless, or at the least, inaccurate artist, certain figures on the map, like the nearby castled elephant, reflect more detailed and

³⁶ See Wilma George, Animals and Maps (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969). Dragons are found on: Ebstorf Map (c. 1235) (Ethiopian), p. 31; Genoese World Map (1457) (Ethiopian), pp. 44-45; Borgia Map (1410-58) (Orient), pp. 52-53; Descellier's Maps (1546 and 1550) (S. America), p. 67; Gastaldi's L'Universale Orbe della Terra (1550) (N. America), p. 101; Olaus Magnus' woodcut Carta Marina (1539) (Eurasia), pp. 114-15.

³⁷ Figure 8 is taken from Allen, p. 78.

attentive consideration. Dragons are displayed on maps varying greatly in artistic merit and dating from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. As did the marvels in travel literature, dragons were forced to retreat to more remote areas, sometimes surrounded by marvellous races or monsters and sometimes confident but conspicuous in a setting of zoological accuracy.

Illustrations accompanying texts concerned with isolated territories and creatures are understandably fabulous (even to the exaggerated sense of figure 7). However, when a cartographer uses the dragon to indicate the fauna of a particular region, the acceptance and attention given the creature is even more apparent. A dragon may seem only one insignificant animal entry in a lengthy thirteenth-century encyclopedia, but when it is one of the relatively few creatures (some others are camels, elephants, unicorns, snakes and birds) that consistently appears on maps for centuries, it is not as easy to dismiss this perception of the creature.

In some visual representations, the problem of definition becomes as acute as it is in translating the ubiquitous *δράκων*. Figure 6 shows a woodcut reproduced from a Latin and Italian edition of Aesop published by Francisco del Tuppo in 1485.³⁸ The fable it illustrates, *The Frogs Ask for a King*,

³⁸ Aesopus: Vita et Fabulae Latine et Italice per Franc. de Tuppo 1485, ed. Carlo de Frede (Naples, 1968), pp. 214

has been traced back to the first century. Ben Edwin Perry's Greek fable no. 44, it can also be found in the Latin of Phaedrus.³⁹ It relates how when the Athenians' restlessness produced a tyrant after years of peaceful democracy, Aesop tells them the story of frogs who called on Zeus to grant them a king to control their morality. Zeus splashes a log down in their marsh which caused the frogs to hide in terror. Upon realizing what it was, and complaining that this ruler was no good, Zeus sent them a ὕδρος (hydrus) who began to snap them up in his mouth one by one. In fear they beseeched Zeus once again only to be told that it is better to have sluggish and less difficult rulers lest a greater evil befall them. The word ὕδρος (hydrus in Phaedrus) is usually translated water-serpent (the Italian has serpente), and yet this fifteenth-century woodcut displays a clearly dragon-like creature, perhaps influenced by the hydrus of the bestiaries.

Compare figure 9 from the same series illustrating The Snake and the File.⁴⁰ A snake looking for food licks a blacksmith's file and seeing its own blood keeps licking until

(figure 6) and 361 (figure 9).

³⁹ Perry, Aesopica, Gr. no. 44, pp. 338-39, and Babrius and Phaedrus, ed. and trans. Ben Edwin Perry, Loeb. (London: Heinemann, 1965), pp. 192-95.

⁴⁰ Perry, Aesopica, Gr. no. 93, p. 358; Babrius and Phaedrus, p. 314.

the fable tells it that it will only hurt itself, for evil cannot hurt anything as evil as itself. The serpent is ἔχιδνα in the Greek and vipera in Latin and Italian. Clearly, the woodcut shows the same creature as in *The Frogs Ask for a King*.

Neither fable's text warrants the dragon interpretation. Yet the artist, in his rendering of both *The Man and the Serpent* and *The Rustic and the Snake*, where the Latin has coluber and anguis, has drawn an ordinary serpent.⁴¹ Doubtless, further investigations into the pictorial traditions of these two fables would prove interesting, if not totally explanatory in this connection. Once again, however, the source of the dragon motif becomes a lesser issue to its environment and possible effect on the viewer--both leading to our increased understanding of the medieval perception of the image.

One possible explanation for the use of the dragon in these woodcuts (or their prototypes), is that even though the dragon is still acting merely as an animal in these fables, we are approaching the symbolic level and as such can expect added interpretation on the artist's part. The Marco Polo illustrator, heavy with traditional models which free him from the text, is still basically representing a

⁴¹ Aesopus: Vita, pp. 164, 255.

dangerous animal found in foreign lands. The cartographer, with imagination even less restricted by the written word, revealingly sketches a dragon--and still, he is dealing with only an animal. The fable illustrator, believing his duty is to convey the narrative and moral, may find connotations produced which dictate his representation of characters. Thus, a serpent king sent to rule the frogs is more appropriately the awesome dragon, rather than an ordinary snake, indicating a certain amount of interpretation on the artist's part and consequently on the viewer's. Similarly, the snake, representing an evil just as the file does, would be more convincing in the shape of the dragon which, in a Christian context, was becoming more and more associated with evil. Such considerations lead us away from the dragon-as-animal and into its function as symbol.

B. The Dragon as Symbol

In Chapter II I reviewed two particularly illuminating genres which used the monster as symbols--the bestiary and biblical exegesis. I will now trace the specific development of the dragon in these areas to encourage more precise interpretations of the medieval symbolic dragon operating in literature.

Bestiary Dragons

The early versions of the Physiologus, as mentioned above, contained basically six monsters: the phoenix, siren, onocentaur, hydrus, salamander and unicorn. Although the selection of entries remained relatively static, especially in the centuries before Isidore, it must be noted that the early extant versions, upon close consideration, reflect a greater interest in monsters than these few entries might indicate.

The dragon is not suddenly appended in later bestiaries, but is regularly present in three otherwise non-monstrous entries from the very earliest versions onwards. It appears in both the narrative and allegory of the elephant, panther and peredixion tree sections, consistently in the role of antagonist.

In the entry on elephants, the B-version first describes the beast as infrequently pregnant, but when the female is ready, the male and female travel east, near paradise, eat of the mandragora tree, mate, and the female conceives. The female takes a certain precaution in delivering her young. She bears her child in the water so that the dragon, apparently land-bound, cannot devour it at birth.⁴² The male

⁴² "cum autem uenerit tempus illius ut pariat, uadit, ubi est stagnum; et ingreditur in aquam usque ab ubera sua, et ibi parit super aquam propter draconem, quia insidiatur

and female elephant are likened to Adam and Eve and the dragon to the serpent in Paradise. Although this is the customary interpretation of this story, note the similarities between the elephant fleeing the dragon and the woman with child fleeing the seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse (see below, pp. 153-54).

The panther in the Physiologus is a beautiful animal loved by all but the dragon. Upon copious feeding, it retires to its den, and, waking after three days, emits a sweet-smelling belch from its mouth which attracts all save the dragon who hides motionless in fear. The panther is interpreted as Christ in the tomb and the dragon as the devil who is bound by Christ's word.⁴³

A third occurrence of the dragon is in the section devoted to the peredixion (perindeus) tree. Doves, enjoying

illi, et si extra aquam peperit, rapit draco pecus illud et deuorat. Ideo in aquam altam ingreditur, ut ibi pariat; masculus autem suus non recedit ab ea, sed custodit eam parientem, propter serpentem qui inimicus est elephantis" (Carmody, p. 57).

⁴³ "Physiologus dicit de eo, quoniam inimicum solum draconem habet. . . . Cum ergo audierint uocem eius omnes bestiae quae prope sunt et quae longe, congregant se omnes et sequuntur suauitatis odorem qui exit de ore eius; solus autem draco, cum audierit uocem eius, timore contrahitur, et fulcit se in terraneis cauernis terrae, ibique non ferens uim suauitatis odoris: in semetipsum contractus obtorpescit, et remanet ibi immobilis atque inanis tamquam mortuus. . . . Christus obdormiuit et requieuit in sepulchro et descendit in infernum et religauit illic draconem magnum et inimicum nostrum. . . ." (Carmody, pp. 40-41).

the sweet fruit, perch in this tree avoiding danger from the dragon lying in wait below. The dragon fears the tree and its shadow. If the doves are found outside the shade of the tree, the dragon is able to consume them. Thus, they follow the shade of the tree, and remain safe. The fruit is knowledge, the shade the Holy Spirit and the doves the faithful, who are exhorted not to stray from the church lest the devil devour them.⁴⁴ The interpretation refers to the dragon as serpens antiquus like the dragon of the Apocalypse. The association of dragon with tree and fruit, reminiscent of Paradise once again, is a familiar mythological combination as well. Although the dragon is not dealt with as individually as the siren or phoenix, it is clear that the Physiologus's reader was expected to have no difficulty identifying the creature.

44 "Est autem draco crudelis inimicus columbarum et quantum columbae timent draconem et fugiunt ab eo, tantum ille draco euitat et pertimescit illam arborem, ita ut nec umbrae illius appropinquare ausus sit. Sed dum insidiatur columbis ille draco, ut rapiat aliquam earum, de longe considerat illam arborem; si umbra illius arboris fuerit in parte dextera, se facit ille in parte sinistra; si autem fuerit umbra eius in parte sinistra, ille fugiens in parte dextera se facit. Columbae autem scientes inimicum suum draconem timere illam arborem, et umbram illius et omnino nec leuiter appropriare illi posse, ideo ad illam arborem confugiunt et ibi se commendant, ut saluae esse possint ab insidiis aduersarii earum. Dum ergo in illa arbore fuerint et in ipsa se continuerint, nullo modo potest eas capere draco; si autem inuenerit aliquam ex eis, uel leuiter segregatam ab arbore, uel extra umbram eius, statim eam rapit et deuorat. Et haec quidem refert Physiologus de columbis. . . . Caue ergo quantum potes ne extra hanc domum foris inuenieris et comprehendas te ille draco serpens antiquus, et deuoret te . . ."
(Carmody, pp. 55-56).

These stories and interpretations persist throughout the bestiary's long tradition, and by the twelfth-century French versions we see the panther section expanding into what must rightfully be called a panther/dragon entry resulting from the greater attention given the dragon. By this time the dragon was also emerging on its own in the Latin versions.

Hrabanus Maurus' ninth-century De rerum naturis was an interesting combination of Isidore's material with the standard theological interpretations which were in agreement with exegesis and bestiary writings. Because Hrabanus' format was the encyclopedia, not the bestiary, and one of his sources was Isidore, we find a considerably more complete list of monsters, including an entry on the dragon, who in Hrabanus' work was the devil or persecutor of the church. This statement follows the standard Isidore description of the dragon, forming what might be one of the earliest concise medieval symbolic statements on the creature. Hrabanus does not stop here, but explicates two verses from the Psalms, adding authority to his interpretation.⁴⁵ The treatment of dragon material in later bestiaries is very much akin to this.

Hrabanus was also responsible for a glossary of biblical symbols called Allegoriae in sacram scripturam in which he

⁴⁵ Hrabanus, P.L. 83:229-30.

attributes different signification to the dragon in various scriptural passages. Pertinent passages will be discussed below. Briefly, for Hrabanus, the dragon is the antichrist in Apoc. 12:3, the spirit of evil in Isaiah 34:13, the Jews in Jeremiah 14:6, and the Gentiles in Isaiah 43:20.⁴⁶

We can trace the development of the dragon entry through the French bestiary writers. Philippe de Thaon's Le bestiaire mentions the dragon in the three accustomed sections: panther, elephant, and peredixion tree. The story of the panther remains faithful to the Latin. The moralization, somewhat elaborated, states clearly that we must understand the dragon to have the shape of the serpent, crested and winged.⁴⁷ This indicates the increased interest in the dragon as symbol in this tradition. The elephant and peredixion tree sections follow the Physiologus closely.⁴⁸

By the early years of the thirteenth century and the next French handling of the material to be examined, the very important Latin bestiary, De bestiis et aliis rebus, was probably written. Nevertheless, the French tradition does not appear to have been as enormously affected by this Latin

⁴⁶ Hrabanus, Allegoriae, P.L., 112:906.

⁴⁷ "E saciez que dragun.
De serpent at faun;
Crestuz est e elez . . ." (Philippe, ll. 657-59).

⁴⁸ Ibid., ll. 1415-1500, ll. 2475-2546.

work as one might expect. Gervaise of Tilbury's Le bestiaire, dated at the very beginning of the thirteenth century, and influenced by the fifth-century Dicta Chrysostomi, has the standard narrative and moralization of the dragon in the panther and elephant sections.⁴⁹ Further, in his entry on serpents, he lists three types: vipers, colubers (usually denoting female serpents) and dragons. He tells how a dragon when thirsty seeks a fountain. The water of the fountain is clean and pure, so the dragon must vomit in a nearby ditch before approaching it. The tale means that when we go to church to listen to the word of God, we should not bring with us covetousness or avarice, but should first have made a true confession.⁵⁰

A second, more interesting story about the dragon Gervaise says we find in Scripture. "When a dragon sees a naked man, it fears him and flees, but when a man is clothed, the dragon runs to him, joins itself to him and poisons him."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gervaise, ll. 139-239, and ll. 381-448. The dragon is also mentioned in the stag entry (ll. 1053-84) but this is an anomaly. The sense and tradition of the story demand serpens not draco (dragon).

⁵⁰ Ibid., ll. 501-6, 577-96.

⁵¹ "Autre nature [a] li dragons
Que en escriture trovons,
Qu'il ha paour de l'ome nu
Et le fuit, mais s'il est vestu
Sore li cort, a lui se joint,
Trestot l'enverime et point" (ibid., ll. 597-602).

Theobaldus attributes this peculiarity to serpentes, cf. p. 32.

Two interpretations follow. When Adam was in Paradise, the devil could not hurt him until he ate the apple, but from that point on, he was in the devil's hands. Also, if a man confesses, he is denuded of his sins. Sins are clothing. Once nude, the man is invulnerable to the devil.

These stories are not usual entries in the Latin tradition. The interpretation of the dragon in the first as the faithful is especially anomalous. More typical in the bestiary tradition was that of Guillaume le Clerc or le Normand. McCulloch notes that his work (1210-11) is the most artistically composed and longest of the French rhymed bestiaries. There are twenty-three extant manuscripts with the majority carefully illustrated. He places a greater importance on the moralization and includes occasional literary and contemporary references.⁵²

These tendencies are reflected in the panther entry which, because of its lengthy sermon and eventual description of the dragon, must more accurately be called the panther/dragon entry. Guillaume records that the dragon is large, lives in Ethiopia, has a small mouth, long tail, big crest, "shines like gold in the air,"⁵³ is the enemy of the elephant and kills only with its tail. Other than the gold colouring,

⁵² McCulloch, p. 59.

⁵³ "En l'air reluist come fins ors" (Guillaume, l. 2228).

we have returned to Isidore.

The last of the four great French bestiary writers, Pierre de Beauvais, treats the panther and elephant sections much as Philippe before him,⁵⁴ and in his longer version, adds an entry on the dragon, perhaps based on Alexander Neckam. The French bestiary tradition, then, was not an isolated one, and although the French writers generally were more closely following the Physiologus, the characteristics of the second family of bestiaries, appearing in Latin in the twelfth century, were slowly incorporated.

We return now to the Latin and the blossoming of this genre to see the dragon entry expanded to an influential status. For an example of this, we can examine a piece of a document written by a man whose encyclopedia treatment of the dragon evolves into the bestiary format, much as Hrabanus above. A writer of fable collections and theological works, Neckam, in his De naturis rerum (c. 1180), has two books on natural science and the remaining three on biblical commentary. The first two books display heavy moralizing, culminating in a discussion of vice and virtue. Although his handling of the material is imbued with scholarly, theological, literary, almost folkloristic tones, we can still easily discern the tradition in which he is working.

⁵⁴ Pierre de Beauvais, pp. 76-78, 86-87.

As well as relating the elephant/dragon tale and standard moral, Neckam devotes two small sections to a description of the beast and a story about it. He explains that the dragon has a small mouth and its power is in its tail, not its teeth. He continues beyond Isidore's treatment of Solinus, however, in that he mentions the dragon's stone.⁵⁵

Further, he relates that dragons possess a transparent type of flesh which has the power to cool whoever consumes it. For this reason, the Aethiopians in their desert clime eagerly seek dragons' flesh, prizing it highly. (Pliny in 8, 32-33 maintained that the dragon attacks the elephant to cool off in its cold blood in warm weather.) For this reason, pedlars tame dragons with certain songs, jumping on their backs and leading them with a bridle into Aethiopia where they are paid great sums for them. He compares this to Psalms 73(74):13, 14 (crushing the heads of dragons-- see below, p. 168). For Neckam, the dragon is the antiquus draco or the vices which Aethiopians eat--Aethiopians or those who are Aethiopian (not whitened) by the deformation of their sins.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Neckam, De nat., II, 145 and 146, pp. 225-26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., II, 147, pp. 226-27. Neckam adds that lest we despise the name of Aethiopia, "ducit enim Moyses Aethiopissam in uxorem. Nigra est sponsa, sed formosa."

Note the "riding" on the dragon's back; a reversal is found in The Dragon and the Farmer fable related by Caxton (above, p. 20). Neckam's dragons are large African beasts associated with the red dragon of the Apocalypse and the serpent of Genesis, and yet endowed with the characteristic of cooling flesh. This is how he remembers the beast as is witnessed in another of his writings, De laudibus divinae sapientiae where he repeats this characteristic (as well as the story of the elephant) in poetry which rapidly records various animal attributes.⁵⁷

Neckam is important to our study in that he was a well-versed Englishman in the twelfth century. His interests are not at all exclusively in the area of natural science or theology, and his statements about dragons can be used as one reflection of an educated man--with literary leanings--and his attitude toward the subject.

One final bestiary must be considered. Once attributed to Hugh of St. Victor, the De bestiis et aliis rebus has recently come under more careful study. Carmody thinks that Migne's note on a multiple authorship of the compilation is somewhat reflected in the varying versions of the Physiologus

57 "Aethiopum populus recreantur carne draconis,
Leniturque calor frigiditate cibi.
Ipsius insidias fugiens, elephas petit undas,
Cum parienti sit tutior unda solo"
(Neckam, p. 488, ll. 103-6).

drawn on in the several books of the De bestiis.⁵⁸ If this work is indeed a compilation done by different authors, as a traditional genre of this sort might easily be, we can place even more confidence in the generality of its ideas and symbols. As it stands, its second book, with few exceptions (the chapter on the dragon is one), is closely within the Physiologus tradition. Here we find the panther/dragon scene (chapter 23), the elephant/dragon scene (chapter 25) and the dragon chapter (24) nicely imbedded between the two almost as a note of clarification.⁵⁹

The content of this section is quoted near the end of the first chapter of this study. The description is the familiar one of Isidore, and the adaptio, moralitas or mystice is the perfect comparison of the devil to the dragon, correlating each item on the list of attributes precisely in this age-old metaphor.

To end a survey of the dragon in bestiaries on this note may be defeating my purpose. It is true that bestiaries, somewhat late in fully exploiting the dragon as a symbolic animal, tended to cast the creature in the role of devil or vice. The formulas, as has been seen, are rigid and their

⁵⁸ Francis Carmody, "De bestiis et aliis rebus and the Latin Physiologus," Speculum, 13 (1938), 155. See p. 154 for a concise list of edited versions.

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor, P.L., 177:71-72.

interpretation varies little over the centuries. Further, a Christian collection requires an actor for this role and the hostile animals were invariably cast. The dragon could hardly be exempted.

Two things are curious about the evidence produced here. First, although we see a consistent negative symbolization in process throughout, we also note a disturbing number of inconsistent characteristics, habits and stories concerning the beast. Second, as a symbolic animal, the dragon should be highly appropriate to the Physiologus and bestiary tradition, yet its appearance is initially timid.

Both problems draw us a step nearer to what "dragon" meant to the medieval mind. One answer to the second problem is that the dragon, exploited in almost all the world's mythologies, was such a well-known beast even by the time of the original Physiologus that an individual entry on the creature seemed superfluous. By the same token, the dragon/devil equation was a conveniently assumed one and little explanation was deemed necessary.

However, many animals of the Physiologus were well-known to the peoples who continued to copy the document. Perhaps, because the dragon was so heavily endowed symbolically, often connoting consummate power and appearing in so many and varied contexts in classical writing (the original Physiologus was, after all, a Hellenistic work), it was too difficult a task for the writer to confine himself to a simple

description and moralitas about the creature. This became more feasible in later centuries with the continued interest in the animal by natural scientists and explorers. Then the bestiary writer had adequate authority concerning the "real" dragon.

This may also explain the curiously inconsistent reports which occur in the bestiaries. Following a considerably interdependent written tradition, bestiaries increased their material by drawing from the other traditions which dealt with the more exotic animals. The dragon, whose range well exceeded other monsters currently in vogue, like the onocentaur, was found to occur in varied forms and with varied habits. Some were incorporated into the bestiaries.

And after all this, the bestiaries were but one example of medieval symbolic use of the dragon. Although it is possible to find rich material on the subject in these texts, they can be disappointing in their interpretive level. For a more comprehensive look at the dragon symbol created by Christian mythology, we move even further from their animal level and examine their occurrence in the Bible.

Biblical Dragons

A second significant use of the symbolic dragon can be traced in the exegesis of specific biblical passages. The following page, listing over thirty references to the dragon

Biblical References to the Dragon

Genesis 1:21

Exodus 7:12, 15

Numbers 21:6

Deuteronomy 32:33

Nehemias (II Esdrae) 2:13

Esther 10:7, 11:6

Job 30:29, 7:12

Psalms 73(74):13, 90(91):13, 103(104):26, 148:7

Sapientia 16:10

Ecclesiasticus 25:23

Isaiah 13:21, 27:1, 34:13, 35:7, 51:9, 43:20

Jeremiah 9:11, 10:22, 14:6, 49:33, 50:39, 51:34, 51:37

Ezechiel 29:3, 32:2

Daniel 14:22-27

Michaea 1:8

Malachias 1:3

Revelations 12:9, 20:3

or dragon-like creatures provides an adequate arena for investigation. Again, the exegetical interpretation will be confined to that of Augustine, Bede, Pope Gregory, the Glossa, and Hugh of St. Cher.

The most well-known dragon in the Bible is the seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse of St. John. This dragon, frequently illustrated and playing a definitive role in the powerful dream-vision of John, can be seen to be largely responsible for the equation of dragon and devil throughout the Middle Ages. Its influence is substantial but must not be assumed in all occurrences of the dragon, especially in the vernacular.

The story related in Revelations is detailed, introducing a plethora of symbolic spirits and animals--some monstrous. A spirit appears to John and reveals to him portents of the end of the world. This narrative format, particularly popular to the literary taste of the late Middle Ages, creates in a totally authorized fashion the fundamentals of Christian animal symbolism.

The evangelical symbols, lion, ox, man and eagle, appear full of eyes inside and out, in 4:7. The lamb with seven horns and seven eyes appears in 5:6 and the four horses, white, red, black, and livid, which are mentioned in the first woe, appear in 6:2. The second woe introduces the seven angels; the fifth angel brings on the locusts with crowns like gold, human faces, women's hair, lion's teeth,

scales and scorpion's tails (9:7). The sixth heralds the horses with lion's heads and tails like serpents (7:17) and the Beast from the abyss which will conquer (11:7).

At the third woe the red dragon finally appears with seven heads, ten horns and seven diadems. Its tail sweeps one-third of heaven's stars to the earth. It stands before the woman about to give birth so that it may devour the child. The woman, giving birth to a son, flees into the wasteland, and a war breaks out in heaven with Michael and his angels pitted against the dragon. The great dragon, the ancient serpent which is called devil and Satan, is driven out and his angels with him. The woman, given two giant eagle's wings, flies into the desert. The serpent sent water from his mouth after the woman, just as a river but the earth helped the woman and absorbed the river. And the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her seed. And it stood upon the sand where the Beast was ascending from the sea. The Beast was described as being like a leopard with feet like a bear and mouth like a lion. And the dragon gave to him his power.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ "Et visum est aliud signum in caelo: et ecce draco magnus rufus habens capita septem, et cornua decem; et in capitibus eius diademata septem et cauda eius trahebat tertiam partem stellarum caeli, et misit eas in terram, et draco stetit ante mulierem, quae erat paritura: ut cum peperisset, filium eius devoraret. Et peperit filium masculum, qui recturus erat omnes gentes in virga ferrea: et raptus est filius eius ad Deum, et ad thronum eius, et mulier fugit in solitudinem ubi habebat locum paratum a Deo, ut ibi

Another Beast appears with two horns like the lamb, and speech like the dragon with the full authority of the first Beast (13:11). Three foul spirits, like frogs, issue from the mouth of the dragon and the mouth of the Beast (16:13). The harlot rides forth on the scarlet Beast with blasphemous titles written on it, seven heads and ten horns (17:3). The Beast and its troops muster for war and the second Beast is thrown into the lake of fire (19:19). The dragon is bound for 1000 years by an angel, shut into an abyss. After this it must be loosed for a while.⁶¹ A description of the New

pascant eam diebus mille ducentis sexaginta. Et factum est praelium magnum in caelo: Michael et angeli eius praeliabantur cum dracone, et draco pugnabat, et angeli eius: et non valuerunt neque locus inventus est eorum amplius in caelo. Et proiectus est draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus et Satanas, qui seducit universum orbem: et proiectus est in terram, et angeli eius cum illo missi sunt. . . . Et postquam vidit draco quod proiectus esset in terram, persecutus est mulierem, quae peperit masculum: et datae sunt mulieri alae aquilae magnae ut volaret in desertum in locum suum ubi aliter per tempus et tempora, et dimidium temporis a facie serpentis. Et misit serpens ex ore suo post mulierem, aquam tanquam flumen, ut eam faceret trahi a flumine. Et adiuvit terra mulierem, et aperuit terra os suum, et absorbit flumen, quod misit draco de ore suo. Et iratus est draco in mulierem: et abiit facere praelium cum reliquis de semine eius, qui custodiunt mandata Dei, et habent testimonium Jesu Christi. Et stetit supra arenam maris. . . . Et vidi de mari bestiam ascendentem habentem capita septem, et cornua decem, et super cornua eius decem diademata et super capita eius nomina blasphemiae. Et bestia, quam vidi similis erat pardo, et pedes ursi, et os eius sicut os leonis. Et dedit illi draco virtutem suam, et potestatem magnam" (Apoc. 12:3-18, 13:1, 2).

⁶¹ "Et vidi angelum descendentem de caelo, habentem clavem abyssi, et catenam magnam in manu sua. Et apprehendit draconem, serpentem antiquum, qui est diabolus, et Satanas, et ligavit eum per annos mille: et misit eum in abyssum, et

Jerusalem follows.

The entire narrative, cosmologically embodying the culmination of man's struggle against natural forces, is frequently symbolized in terms of monsters as studies of the world's great mythologies show us. The next chapter will bring these age-old patterns into focus. More specifically, Christian mythology is here structured with meanings far from subtle. Even if the allusion to Michael the Archangel fails to identify the dragon, one cannot be long in doubt before the line "draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus qui vocatur diabolus et Satanas" (12:9) establishes the equation of dragon and devil in this context.

Commentary on these passages encompasses the major aspects of the dragon/devil metaphor. Augustine⁶² states that the large red dragon is the devil seeking to devour the Church (the woman's son). Bede and Hugh⁶³ associate red with blood and sins. The Glossa⁶⁴ clarifies that it is magnus not from its size but from its power and pride. Hugh

clausit, et signavit super illum ut non seducat amplius gentes, donec consummentur mille anni: et post haec oportet illum solvi modico tempore" (Apoc. 20:1-3).

⁶² Augustine, P.L. 35:2441-58.

⁶³ Bede, P.L. 93:166-92, and Hugh, VII, 401-21.

⁶⁴ Glossa, VI, 1578ff.

adds that it is a dragon because of its treachery.⁶⁵ The seven heads are kings and the horns kingdoms, according to Augustine. The Glossa has the ten horns representing the kingdoms and riches which fight against the Decalogues. Hugh agrees, adding that the seven heads are the seven deadly sins and seven crowns the victory of these sins.

Note that the dragon chases the woman into the wilderness--the usual habitat for the creature, especially in biblical passages. The scenario involves a vulnerable woman and a dragon, a pattern common to romance and saints' lives. The combat between Michael, armed hero against the dragon, is iconographically similar to St. George and the dragon, the archangel's wings and George's horse often being the determining factors in identification if context is unavailable.

The dragon shoots water (not fire) from its mouth to destroy its prey but is thwarted this time not by a personalized hero, but the earth itself. The dragon goes off to make war on the rest of her seed, opening the door to countless other dragon/devil interpretations. Its immediate effect in the narrative is that the dragon gives the Beast its power.

⁶⁵ Great similarity and/or confusion exists between the dragon's treachery and that of the serpent in the garden of Eden: "Sed et serpens erat callidior cunctis animantibus terrae quae fecerat Dominus Deus" (Genesis 3:1).

The Beast, unlike the dragon, is a composite monster, almost the perfect image for the exegete. Augustine writes that it is part leopard because it simulated the variety of nations, a bear because of malice and insanity, a lion because of strength of body and pride of tongue. The Beast is, of course, the Antichrist whose kingdom will be mixed with a variety of nations and peoples. The exegesis supports many connotative medieval interpretations of animals.

Later the Beast is said to be speaking as the dragon (13:11). Augustine comments that this describes one who puts forth the lamb under the Christian name in order that he might infuse it with the venom of the dragon. Bede simply interprets this speech as lies. Dragon's speech is often wise, and often treacherous (cf. Fáfnir, below, p. 215).

The picture of the dragon produced by the Apocalypse associates it in the minds of readers with the mythological seven-headed hydra. Yet the red dragon is iconographically a reptilian dragon, not a serpent or crocodile. The fabulous nature of John's vision necessitates the retention of the age-old monster even in the most realistic translations. Unlike those in the selection of passages which will be examined next, the dragon of the Apocalypse is still a dragon, even for modern readers, and the interpretation is blatant. The dragon is the devil. However, if we consider that the dragon was perceived as such and interpreted in many other passages not always as the devil, and that this Christian

mythology, albeit the most dominant, was only one mythology using the image, we begin to appreciate the richness of the dragon symbol in medieval literature. Recognition of this polyvalent symbolization is essential. Limiting ourselves to only our modern perception and interpretation of the creature clearly reduces our understanding of it in more challenging contexts.

Monsters have been progressively filtered out of the Bible. The medieval man's Bible contained many more monsters than our Bible today. One primary difficulty in our comprehension of the use of these creatures is that centuries of this process have pulled us further and further away from any meaningful and powerful use of the fabulous. This process, however, did not begin in the Renaissance. The loss of the dragon in a passage of Genesis occurred before the Vulgate. Genesis 1:21 states "And God created great whales and every living creature that moves." The Vulgate records ceti (whales) as the translation of the peculiar Hebrew term tannin which develops into as problematic a word as draco. Tannin could mean sea monster, dragon or whale and has been translated in the Vulgate usually as draco or cetus.

This reference is significant in that it begins the list of individual animals created by God, starting with the largest of sea creatures. According to bestiary tradition, this would be the marine version of the largest animal, the

dragon, or so it would seem from the Glossa's comment on Ezech. 32:2. This passage compares the Pharaoh to a dragon in the sea. The Glossa notes that the dragon is the devil, "that is, a whale, as in Gen.:1, where our translation has cete grandia in Hebrew it has great dragons."⁶⁶

The Vulgate's Job 7:12 renders tannin as cete once again as Job rhetorically asks, "Am I the sea or a whale (sea monster) that you surrounding me, would guard me?"⁶⁷ Pope Gregory neatly perpetuates the association of dragon/devil in his comment on the verse: "what else is meant by ceti if not the ancient enemy?"⁶⁸ Both the Glossa and Hugh interpret the cetus as the devil.⁶⁹

Genesis 1:21 is important because it asserts that God created great sea monsters, rather than great sea monsters created the earth, which was the ancient belief. In Genesis 1:2 the "deep" or the abyssus was originally the Hebrew tehom, etymologically related to Tiamat, the sea monster

⁶⁶ "Leoni gentium assimilatus es,
Et draconi qui est in maris" (Ez. 32:2);
"id est ceto unde Gen. 1, ubi nostra translatio habet: cete
grandia in Hebraeo habetur dracones magnos" (Glossa, IV,
255v).

⁶⁷ "Numquid mare ego sum, aut cetus,
Quia circumdedisti me carcere?" (Job 7:12).

⁶⁸ Gregory, P.L. 75:824 (here as Job 8:12, not Job 7:12).

⁶⁹ Glossa, III, 108, and Hugh, I, 406.

(dragon)⁶ whose body was used to create the world. Recent biblical scholarship has revealed more and more the Old Testament's relationship to Caananite and Babylonian mythology.

One reason for a larger number of dragon and monster references in the Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah is probably because these books, not part of the Pentateuch, did not undergo the scrutiny and purification of those books in their transmission. Thus, we find more reference to Caananite history and mythology and (especially in the Psalms), a poetic element which would welcome these powerful images.

More problems arose with the Hebrew word tannin (sea monster or dragon) because it was confused with the word tannim (jackal), especially when it occurred with a masculine plural case ending -im: tanninim. The Vulgate indiscriminantly rendered both these words as draco or cetus. The list above shows the multiple references. Medieval exegetes, in turn, commented on nearly all as the dracones they knew from encyclopedias and myth. Up to the time of the King James Old Testament, these dragons were retained. By the publishing of the Revised Standard Version, the mistake was corrected and the jackals were the creatures of the wastelands, not the dragons.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Biblical scholars now stress the connections between the ancient myths (see Chapter IV) and the Old Testament. See Umberto Cassuto, Biblical and Oriental Studies, Vol. II:

But we need not confine our examination to more obscure references. Augustine describes a very palpable dragon in his exegesis on Psalm 148:7: "Praise the lord of earth, dragons and all the abysses."⁷¹ According to Augustine, "Dragons live around water, emerge from caves and are borne in the air which is agitated by them. They are great living creatures; greater are not found on earth. For this reason the verse begins by saying Dracones et omnes abyssi." All the moist hidden parts of the earth and lowest air "are called abyssus and abyssi where dragons live and praise God. Why? Should we think that dragons form a chorus and praise God? No. But you, in considering dragons, should note the artifice of dragons and the creator of dragons, and when you marvel at dragons and say, 'Great God who made these,' dragons praise God with your voices."⁷²

Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), pp. 69-109. I am indebted to Mark Smiley for assistance in this area.

⁷¹ "Laudate Dominum de tefra
Dracones et omnes abyssi" (Ps. 148:7).

⁷² "Dracones circa aquam versantur, de speluncis procedunt, feruntur in aera; concitatur propter eos aer: magna quaedam sunt animantia dracones, majora non sunt super terram. Propterea inde coepit dicere, Dracones et omnes abyssi . . . abyssus vel abyssi vocantur, ubi vivunt dracones et laudant Deum. Quid? putamus quia chorus faciunt dracones, et laudant Deum? Absit. Sed vos considerantes dracones, attendite artificem draconum, creatorem draconum; et cum miramini dracones, et dicitis, Magnus Deus qui haec fecit, dracones laudant Deum de vocibus vestris" (Augustine, P.L. 37:1943).

The dragons that Augustine writes about here are a species of great cave-dwelling flying creatures. To explain the line that suggests that these frightening animals praise God, Augustine first emphasizes the grandeur of the creature. Our admiration at its creator is the praise spoken of. The dragon here in no way represents the devil. The description is similar to the accepted encyclopedia entries. The stress is on the dragon's size and magnificence--not on its cunning or evil. It symbolizes God's creative achievement, for it is, indeed, the largest animal of creation.

The exegesis of the Psalms dubiously assigned to Bede merely states in reference to this passage that all creatures praise God.⁷³ Hugh of St. Cher's interpretation, very similar to Augustine's, repeats the Glossa's note on the cete adopted by the Vulgate in Gen. 1:3, in order to reassert the dragon's position as greatest animal. He adds that the dragon's food is the elephant, that they are lifted into the air by their wings and that they retire into watery caverns. Again, such a marvellous creature makes us praise God.⁷⁴

These passages illustrate that the dragon was not only a symbol of evil, but one of consummate animal power. Both a fifth-century commentator and his thirteenth-century heir tell us so. Yet, whatever the dragon symbolizes in individual

⁷³ Bede, P.L. 93:1097.

⁷⁴ Hugh, II, 354.

passages, it must be remembered that biblical exegesis would necessarily tend to cast a creature of the dragon's stature in the role of devil, because this role must be filled to satisfy the instructive element in Christian mythology.

Psalm 90:13 is a vivid example of this process. "You will walk on the asp and basilisk and crush the lion and dragon."⁷⁵ I have delayed examination of biblical references to the basilisk to make this point about Christian symbolic use of animals. In reference to this passage, Augustine writes, "The lion attacks openly; the dragon lies in ambush secretly. The devil has both strength and power (vim et potestatem). When the martyrs were killed, the lion was raging; when heresies ambush, the dragon is creeping in wait. You have conquered the lion; conquer the dragon. The lion did not break you; let the dragon not ensnare you." After an interlude on the virgin and serpent, Augustine adds, "The basilisk is the king of serpents just as the devil is the king of demons."⁷⁶

Which animal represents the devil? They all seem to. Pseudo-Bede's commentary expands: "The basilisk and asp represent everything harmful. The basilisk is king of serpents and head of demons; the asp is the underling of

⁷⁵ "Super aspidem et basiliscum amulabis. Et conculcabis leonem et draconem". (Ps. 90:13).

⁷⁶ Augustine, P.L. 37:1168.

demons. The lion attacks openly; the dragon secretly. The asp's is an open attack whereas the basilisk will attack with breath alone, even when you do not see him, but you will know the two secret enemies by the open ones."⁷⁷

Finally, Hugh's response to this pregnant verse has yet one more dimension:

The basilisk signifies the Antichrist, or hypocrites. . . . Through lion, understand a cruel Prelate and through dragon, excess (luxuria). . . . The dragon, an immense beast, with fiery breath kills whatever it touches; not only beasts of the land, but also flying creatures, and it hides in the sand. This is luxuria which greatly rules the unproductive inactive man.⁷⁸

Continuing in this line, Isaiah has three references to the basilisk.⁷⁹ The Glossa interprets the creature as the devil in 11:8, and Ezechias in a prophecy concerning the

⁷⁷ Bede, P.L. 93:976.

⁷⁸ Hugh, II, 242-43.

⁷⁹ "Et delectabitur infans ab ubere super foramine
aspidis;
Et in caverna reguli,
Qui ablactatus fuerit manum suam mittet" (Is. 11:8);
"Ne laeteris, Philisthaea omnis tu,
Quoniam comminuta est virga percussoris tui;
De radice enim colubri egredietur regulus,
Et semen eius absorbens volucrem" (Is. 14:29);
"Onus iumentorum austri
In terra tribulationis et angustiae
Leaena, et leo ex eis,
Vipera et regulus volans;
Portantes super humeros iumentorum divitias suas,
Et super gibbum camelorum thesauros suos,
Ad populum qui eis prodesse non poterit"
(Is. 30:6).

Philistines in 14:29,⁸⁰ whereas Hugh glosses the cavern of the basilisk as evil accord (14:29), and in 30:6 the image of the basilisk is used primarily for stressing the immediacy of the venom (one look kills).⁸¹

Returning to dragon exegesis, we note that there exist many occurrences designed essentially to accent the desolation of a location which is a device used in other monster passages. Isaiah 34:13 illustrates this: "And thistle and nettle grow in his houses, and a thorn in his fortifications and it will be a bed of dragons and pastures for ostriches."⁸² Hugh explains that these (thistle, nettle, thorn and dragon) are all signs of extreme solitude, because if the former are there, a man can scarcely spend the night, but if dragons are present, the place is totally uninhabitable to men.⁸³

Yet Hugh reverses this interpretation of the dragon in his comment on the more well-known line, "There is no wrath greater than the wrath of a woman. I would rather dwell

⁸⁰ (11:8) Glossa, IV, 29, and (14:29) Glossa, IV, 34.

⁸¹ Hugh, IV, 31 (Is. 11:8); IV, 37 (Is. 14:29); IV, 64 (Is. 30:6).

⁸² "Et orientur in domibus eius spinae et urticae,
Et paliurus immunitationibus eius;
Et erit cubile draconum,
Et pascua struthionum" (Is. 34:13).

⁸³ Hugh, IV, 76.

with a lion or dragon than with a woman."⁸⁴ He clarifies that sometimes it is possible to live with a lion or dragon without peril. A dragon or lion can only hurt the body: (Note the absence of devil undertones here.) A woman is like a lion because of her heat, wrath and passion--like a dragon because, as a dragon pursues an elephant (symbol of purity); so a woman pursues the chastity of men. A lion harms openly; a dragon secretly, but a woman in both ways. A lion is a cruel leader; a dragon a heretic.⁸⁵ The Glossa adds that a lion and a dragon are preferable enemies in that, unlike a woman, they often show their wrath before they bite.⁸⁶

This type of interpretation is understandable. The meaning of the passage is clear. The exegete's job then is to determine which aspects of each creature--lion and dragon--should be kept in mind to enhance the unstated simile. The dragon as a symbol here is interpreted differently than in the Isaiah quotation above, yet the basic animal traits are consistent. The dragon is still a secretive assailant and is being counterpointed not only to a woman but to a lion.

⁸⁴ "Et non est ira super iram mulieris.
Commorari leoni et draconi placebit,
Quam habitare cum muliere nequam" (Eccu. 25:23).

⁸⁵ Hugh, III, 223recto.

⁸⁶ Glossa, III, 2105.

Although⁸⁷ comparison of a dragon to a lion is familiar in the Bible, references to ostriches are likewise repeated, but the message implied, according to the commentators, is once again reversed. Ostriches, as in Isaiah 34:13, are included in the environment of desolate places like the dragon, siren and lamia, but they also have an individual connotation as indicated in Job 30:29: "I was the brother of dragons and the friend of ostriches."⁸⁷ The dragon is glossed as open wickedness and the ostrich as deceit (because ostriches have feathers but do not fly).⁸⁸

Compare also Is. 43:20 which proclaims, "The beasts of the land will glorify me, dragons and ostriches because I gave water into the desert. . . ."⁸⁹ Hugh once again draws this same distinction asserting that dragons represent tyrants first filled with the venom of envy and ostriches represent philosophers full of vainglory and hypocrisy.⁹⁰

The disparate symbolizations produced in these passages, particularly where animals are concerned, demand a much less rigid interpretation than hitherto afforded the monster.

⁸⁷ "Frater fui draconum,
Et socius struthionum" (Job 30:29).

⁸⁸ Hugh, I, 435verso.

⁸⁹ "Glorificabit me bestia agri,
Dracones, et struthiones,
Quia dedi in deserto aquas . . ." (Is. 43:20).

⁹⁰ Hugh, IV, 98.

Dragons are used to describe an uninhabitable place--yet also it is said one may be able to live among them without peril. They attack secretly and lions attack openly. Other commentary asserts that they attack openly and ostriches attack secretly.

Further, Hugh sees the dragon as symbolizing pride as well as the dominium Daemonum⁹¹ in Psalm 73(74):13-14: "You plundered the sea with your power; you ground the heads of dragons in the water. You smashed together the heads of the Leviathan and gave him as food for the sea monsters."⁹²

Still, the dragon as a symbol of wasteland must not be underestimated and I return to it here. Malachi 1:3 states clearly, "I have hatred for Esau. I placed his mountains in the wilderness and his heritage in a dragon desert." Note the similarity to Jeremiah 10:22: "Behold news comes and a great commotion from the land of the north, as it makes the towns of Judah a desert and a habitation of dragons."⁹³ The

⁹¹ Hugh uses a different version of the Old Testament here, listing draco instead of Leviathan, but his interpretation is not hard to understand: See II, 189.

⁹² "Tu dirupisti potentia tua mare,
Contrivisti capita draconum in aquis.
Tu confregisti capita Leviathan,
Dedisti eum escam monstris marinis"
(Ps. 73(74):13-14).

⁹³ "Esau autem odio habui, et posui montes eius in solitudinem, et haereditatem eius in dracones deserti" (Mal. 1:3);
"Vox auditionis ecce venit,
Et commotio magna de terra aquilonis,
Ut ponat civitates Iuda solitudinem,
Et habitaculum draconum" (Jer. 10:22).

Glossa considers a habitation of dragons similar to one of ostriches or sirens, namely the abode of certain monstra and demonum phantasmata.⁹⁴

Hugh's scholarship clarifies this gloss, explaining that, according to the Septuagint, we read cubile of ostriches, and according to Symmachus, one of sirens. All are venomous creatures. The dragon is an animal that from within has a venomous nature, yet it has a skin like gold and smokes so that it seems to emit fire, and a great thirst; thus, many appear good from the exterior, but on the inside are venomous, greedy and destroy others.⁹⁵

Further biblical passages and explication may only serve to belabour the point. The dragon, although often used in Christian mythology to portray the devil, on close examination can be seen to hold other, even contradictory meanings for the medieval exegete. In addition, when representing Satan, a dragon's physical attributes are often essential to the symbol.

A cursory look at the symbolizations examined here reveals the dragon representing the devil because it is huge from power and pride and treachery. The Apocalyptic dragon is red because of sins or blood; its seven heads are the seven deadly sins. Moreover, the dragon represents:

⁹⁴ Glossa, IV, 127.

⁹⁵ Hugh, IV, 207.

1. the devil (because it is largest sea animal or whale)
2. consummate animal power
3. secret attack (heresies or heretics)
4. open attack (wickedness)
5. luxuria
6. pride or dominion of demons
7. uninhabitable wasteland
8. the pursuer of chastity
9. venomous tyrants
10. beauty on the outside and wickedness within

Using the medieval tenets of natural history, Christian handling, through bestiaries and biblical exegesis, established a rich body of material involving the symbolic dragon. The creature itself was still the springboard for these interpretations and thus retained the importance of its nature and habits.

Bestiaries, primarily picture-books, abound in interestingly diverse illustrations of the dragon in which the artist attempts to render a creature which embodies consummate evil. One look through such a manuscript reveals that there is not just one dragon, but many. Besides the expected dragon-like lines of the basilisk, amphisbaena, hydrus and hydra, we find such lines on many other types of serpents.

For instance, in the twelfth-century bestiary edited by M. R. James in 1928, the illustrations of the dragon, boa, siren snake, scitalis and amphisbaena (figure 10) all display

the traditional dragon features.⁹⁶ We note the bird- (as opposed to serpent-) shaped body, claws, long tapered tail, small ears and full bird-like wings.

Bestiary illustrations collected by Florence McCulloch (figure 11)⁹⁷ show this pattern as well as variant representations. The amphisbaena is sometimes pictured with dragon-like qualities, and sometimes as the mundane, yet two-headed, little worm. Note also the many-winged variety of dragon and the almost mammalian viper.

In contrast, figure 12 displays a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Italian woodcut illustrating the viper in a bestiary with all the necessary attributes to be considered a dragon.⁹⁸ Very much akin to the artist's representation of the viper in the above fable (see figure 9), the woodcut suggests, if not the same hand, then a fairly established iconographical tradition of dragon-like creatures which crosses the boundaries of genre. In these illustra-

⁹⁶ Figure 10 shows drawings of serpents copied from Ms. II.4.26, Cambridge University Library, reproduced in White, pp. 166, 170, 176-77, 180-81. See also M.R. James, The Bestiary (Oxford: University Press, 1928).

⁹⁷ Figure 11 shows drawings of serpents copied from various manuscripts and collected in Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), from plates I, III, VII, X.

⁹⁸ Illustration from the Libellus de Natura Animalium, 15th-C. bestiary, 1st printed 1508-12, reprod. J. I. Davis (London: Dawson's, 1958). Note the dissimilarity to the Liber Monstrorum's half human viper.

tions, the dragon has the same qualities as those pictured in the twelfth-century bestiary (figure 10) but with a discernible exaggeration. The ears are longer, the wings more dramatic, the face more horrifying. The representation of the serpent, however, is far less fabulous. Although no serpent in bestiaries receives a favourable interpretation, the viper's properties are particularly vile. The female is reported to bite the male's head off during copulation, and the young gnaw through their mother's body, killing her before their natural birth. The viper, then, symbolizes homicide or any mortal sin. Compare these later, dragon-like vipers to the considerably less dragon-like or even monstrous vipers in figures 10 and 11. We begin to wonder about these contrasting representations of the same creature, described similarly in their accompanying texts.

Artists can be said to create particularly effective monsters, especially when a symbolic level is operative. In a time when the actual attributes of a creature were in doubt, the artistic representation became very difficult to question. Still, we can conjecture that when the creature carries the interpretive baggage which the bestiary dragon or viper had, the Christian artist may well have pictorially translated the "evilness" of the creature in terms of jagged fangs, hideous leers, and bat-like wings. This is no reliable rule, of course. Imaginative artists were quite capable of rendering grotesque creatures with no thought to their possible

symbolic interpretations, as the creatures in figure 7 clearly demonstrate. The discrepancy between the earlier and later bestiary representations, I suggest, may have resulted from the increased popularity of the dragon/devil equation throughout the Middle Ages. The monsters in later bestiaries which were interpreted as the devil in the text would appear more demonic in the illustration, branching further away from the natural scientific origins of the bestiary.

Pictorially, the distinction between the animal and symbol level is almost impossible to recognize without textual aid. This is precisely the problem in evaluating the Romanesque grotesques. When the text accompanying the illustration is symbolic, the illustration can be examined for attributes which convey the artist's interpretation of the text. The dragon in figure 2, for example, displays the horned, goat-like attributes iconographically associated with the devil, not the dragon, thus revealing a fundamentally symbolic representation of the dragon. Similarly, the abundant miniatures of the Apocalypse cycles testify to the actively creative impulse the fabulous gave to artists. Figure 5 is just one example of this symbolic dragon interacting in a pictorial narrative.⁹⁹ Representations of the Apocalyptic

⁹⁹ Hogarth provides reproductions of over a half dozen medieval Apocalyptic dragon representations.

dragon are vivid examples of the dragon motif in art operating on a symbolic level. The dragon in the text (see above, p. 155) clearly represents the devil and the visual portrayals emphasize the interpretation of the beast. In figure 5, we see the seven cruel heads of the dragon balanced on a body similar in shape and wing formation to the bestiary drawings examined above. As such, this particular delineation of the creature combines a bestiary pictorial tradition with the artist's attempt to convey wickedness in his presentation of the horned heads and fangs. The creature, thwarted, stares in frustration at the woman and child, thereby visually involving the dragon in the narrative. This places the motif more firmly on a symbolic level. It also presents a much closer relationship to the text than we saw in the Marco Polo illustration.

Biblical stories are not always so easily interpreted visually, however. The difficulty in determining the distinction between whale and dragon mentioned above is exhibited in the various dragon-like creatures which vomit up Jonah throughout the Middle Ages and before, as in figure 13,¹⁰⁰ a third-century marble sculpture from the eastern Mediterranean. Although the whale has been seen to be interpreted as the devil (see above, p. 159), and this marble's swinish head,

¹⁰⁰ Figure 13 is taken from Francis Huxley, The Dragon (New York: Collier, 1979), p. 46.

leonine feet and wing-like fins certainly produce a "devilish" monster, a conscious interpretation on the artist's part is not necessary for the efficacy of the work. Note the similarity to the German aquamanile in figure 14.¹⁰¹ This portly creature, whose size perhaps identifies it as a dragon, even though its comb suggests the basilisk, was fashioned in the twelfth or thirteenth century. The little man protruding from the mouth of the creature links it thematically to the Jonah and the whale tradition. As with the Jonah sculpture, our insufficient knowledge of the artist's intention prohibits any verifiable interpretation of the dragon motif in this example.

When we consider the symbolic nature of the dragon in the plastic arts, invariably we must at some time return to St. Bernard's complaint about the inexplicable monsters in ecclesiastic architectural ornament. Figure 15 shows an arch taken from a twelfth-century church in Narbonne.¹⁰² The eight beasts may be identified as (from left), a manticore, pelican, amphisbaena, harpy, griffin, dragon with a nowed (knotted) amphisbaena tail, centaur and highly stylized lion complete with crown and human face. The collection and

¹⁰¹ Figure 14 is taken from Richard H. Randall, Jr., A Cloisters Bestiary (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1960), p. 39.

¹⁰² Figure 15 is taken from Bonnie Young and Malcolm Varon, A Walk through the Cloisters (New York: Metropolitan Museum, n.d.), pp. 53-54.

iconography of the creatures immediately evoke the bestiaries and the bestiary interpretation for each. Does the artist wish us to recall the symbolic nature of each? Is that its didactic purpose? If so, why are the pelican and lion--bestiary symbols of Christ--intermingled with such an array of monsters? And of the monsters, the graceful detail, swirling lines and peaceful faces make us wonder if the artist was attempting to frighten us into spiritual devotion or not. Certainly the educated man would be familiar with the stock bestiary interpretation of each, but he probably would also know a little of the animal itself. The artist here seems to be endowing these figures with a richness that embodies not only their Christian symbols, but their animality as well. The arch remains a representation of both animal qualities and interpretation, which accounts for its more ambivalent presentation of the creatures. Thus it operates on a symbolic level, not a signal one which would simplify the message and lose the dimension inherent in symbolic monsters. If one admits to no interpretation of the arch, then the animal level is operative.

C. The Dragon as Sign

Following Isidore's etymology of monstrum,¹⁰³ we take monsters to be portents in that they show (monstrare) future events. In addition, monstrum should be thought of in terms of warning (monitu) concerning future happenings. He provides examples of monstrous births which portend the fall of peoples or individual men, including Alexander's monstrous offspring (cf. Alexander's conception, according to romance, below, p. 278).

This section of his Etymologiae immediately precedes Book XII, De animalibus. In his thorough way, Isidore seems to be wrapping up the loose ends of creation. He initially considers the individual monstrous births which "show" something, moving on to mythical monsters such as the Minotaur and Cerberus, talking also of the monstrous races (e.g., cynocephali, gigantes, cyclopes) which in this study are designated marvels. Isidore does not stop here, but continues on about satyrs, sirens and centaurs--species of human/beast monsters. Confusingly, he also mentions the hydra and chimera (animal monsters) and terminates the book with a word about Circe's transformed men.

¹⁰³ "Portenta autem et ostenta, monstra atque prodigia ideo nuncupantur, quod portendere atque ostendere, monstrare ac praedicare aliqua futura videntur. . . . Monstra vero a monitu dicta quod aliquid significando demonstrent, et hoc proprietatis est, abusione tamen scriptorum plerumque corrumpitur . . ." (Isidore, Et., 11, 3).

All these creatures are noted before Isidore talks of animals and the remaining monsters listed under his name in Appendix 3. These especially portentous creatures may be distinguished because of their classical heritage, that is, they are mythological prodigies, whereas the "animals" considered (the dragon among them) are more Isidore's contribution to natural science.

If we are to examine more closely the image of a dragon signifying one particular idea, we can clearly see how a portent, vision or dream is a perfect tool for this interpretive level. Assuming then, that Isidore in the seventh century could easily perceive monstra as he defined them to be, that is, portentous (perhaps partly because of their ancient ties), was it not natural for the Middle Ages to interpret many monstrous creatures as such? Since Isidore's distinctions between monsters hardly held for all writers, literary or non-literary, could we not see the dragon assuming an important position as portent?

Consider these points: (1) The etymology of the word--albeit not known to all--traces dragon to draco to δράκων to δράκ- (second aorist stem of δέσμεσθαι) which means "to see clearly" and also "gleaming as from the eye"--apt definitions for a portent. (2) All monsters on a signal level are essentially the most truly free expression of man's imagination because they have nothing in reality to correspond to the "concept" behind them. Man has created this kind of

creature, not God, and the effect is perceived by a writer's attempt to identify the unknown by putting disparate known parts (the head of an eagle, the tail of a lion) together. Although the natural scientist could be dealing with a real animal (camelopard = giraffe), the descriptive device is by needs creative, and without a priori evidence (as with the dragon), continues to be so in every successive description. (3) As such, a dragon is often so described as embodying the strengths of all classes of animals: reptiles, birds, mammals and fish, rendering the sign of ultimate animal power (a concept familiar not only to Christian symbolism).

If one considers the dragon's almost universal appearance in the mythologies of man, one may more readily understand the creature's popular use as portent. Indeed, the dragon becomes perhaps the most monstrans of monsters.

The dragon-as-sign in literary texts will be examined in a further chapter. Here I offer two disparate occurrences of this use of the creature. First, the prophetic dream of Mordecai, as recorded in Esther involved a little spring which became a river, a light which shone, the sun, a flood of waters, and two dragons which Mordecai interprets as himself and Haman. He adds that "God has saved his people. He liberated us from all evils and made great signs and portents among peoples."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ "Duo autem dracones: ego sum, et Aman . . . et salvum

Another quite well-known example of the dragon-as-sign is the 793 A.D. entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

There were terrible fore-warnings which came over the land of the Northumbrians which terrified the people wretchedly. There were immense light flashes and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. Great famine immediately followed these signs. Shortly afterward, in this same year on the sixth day before the Ides of January, the harrying of heathen men woefully devastated the church of God in Lindisfarne through plunder and slaughter. . . .¹⁰⁵

Less well known, but of the same nature, and text, is the 774 entry: "and men saw a red Christ's sign (crucifix) in the heavens after sunset. In this year the Mercians and men of Kent fought at Otford, and strange serpents (nædran) were seen in the land of the South-Saxons."¹⁰⁶

fecit Dominus populum suum: liberavitque nos ab omnibus malis, et fecit signa magna atque portenta inter gentes" (Esther 10:7, 9).

¹⁰⁵ "Her wæron reðe forebecna cumene ofer Norðanhymbra-land. þ folc earmlice bregdon; þ wæron ormete lig ræscas, wæron ge seowene fyrene dracan on þam lyfte fleogende. þam tacnum sona fyligde mycel hunger. litel æfter þam þas ilcan geares on . vi . idus Iaŋr earmlice heðenra manna hergung adiligode Godes cyrican. in Lindisfarena ee. þurh reafiac. man sleht. . . ." (in Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel: A Revised Text, ed. Charles Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892; rpt. 1929), I, 55-57 (Laud MS)).

¹⁰⁶ "men ge segon read Cristes mel on heofenum æfter sunnan setlan gange. on þy geare ge fuhton Myrce Cantwara æt Ottaforda. wundorlice nædran wæron ge seogene on Suð-seaxna lande" (ibid., I, 50-51 (Laud MS)). A. G. Rigg pointed out to me a similarity between these nædran and the serpentes St. Hilda turns to stone also in the eighth century and also in Sussex. See St. Hilda and the Whitby Abbey, ll. 228-41, in Trinity College, Cambridge Ms. 0.9.38 indexed in Rigg's A Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 94.

All three examples indicate a probable acceptance of the dragon as a portent in a non-literary context. Its occurrence as such in medieval literature should be expected.

One unusual example of the dragon-as-sign in the visual arts is the last great miniature in the famous fifteenth-century Les très riches heures of the Duke of Berry (figure 16).¹⁰⁷ In this illustration of St. Michael battling the dragon in heaven, we see the combat occurring over the highly appropriate abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel complete with accompanying buildings and prowed boats. The architectural extravagance and rich landscapes delightfully characteristic of the entire manuscript are displayed in the miniature to the extent that the picture is more truly of the Mount than the battle. The abbey, hopelessly anachronistic, is nevertheless dominant, and St. Michael and the dragon are transposed to visual signs of the purpose and spiritual victory of the building beneath them. There is a complexity of interpretive levels here. The heavenly battle, as a short, symbolic narrative, has evolved into a highly effective sign for the abbey bearing St. Michael's name. This is paradoxical, because, whereas the text (a standard homiletic

¹⁰⁷ Figure 16 is taken from Edmond Pognon, Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry, trans. David Macrae (New York: Crescent, n.d.), p. 123.

description of the Michael/dragon episode in heaven) is using the picture of the abbey as a sign or representation of this combat, the illustration itself puts the heavenly battle in the more figurative position.

Clearer examples of the dragon-as-sign are the dragons frequently found in heraldry down through the ages. Figure 17 illustrates the essential differences between the dragon, wyvern (two legs) and cockatrice (basilisk) in heraldic art.¹⁰⁸ The dragon was more often a supporter or crest, not a charge, and figure 18 displays the red dragon as left supporter for the arms of the Tudor King Henry VI in the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁹ This beast (here, bright red and bear-like) has a long history of association with England and its families which is traced in detail in an article by J. S. P. Tatlock.¹¹⁰ I will summarize some important points here.

The dragon was adopted as an ensign by the Romans as early as 175 A.D. and was used as the ensign for a cohort in the fourth century. The red or purple dragon was used by

¹⁰⁸ Figure 17 is taken from John Woodward and George Burnett, A Treatise on Heraldry, British and Foreign (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1969), plate 27.

¹⁰⁹ Figure 18 is taken from a manuscript from the British Museum reproduced in Hogarth, p. 158.

¹¹⁰ "The Dragons of Wessex and Wales," Speculum, 8 (1933), 223-35. For family arms see also Arnold Whittick, Symbols, Signs and Their Meaning (London: Leonard Hill, 1960), pp. 22ff.

emperors. The Continental Saxons were recorded as using a dragon but no occurrences of such are found in France. The dragon of Wessex was reported to be used on an ensign in the battle of Burford in 752 and in the battle of Assandun in 1016, and the Bayeux Tapestry shows a dragon (more accurately, a wyvern) ensign near the slain Harold in the battle of Hastings. The heraldic dragon disappears for 125 years till Richard I in 1190, and once again vanishes in the mid-fourteenth century, which Tatlock speculates might have been caused by the popularity of the St. George myth by that time, making the dragon ensign incongruous to the then-carried banner of St. George.

Originally the red dragon was borne by the English against the Welsh and little early evidence for the Welsh use of this creature as the national symbol has been found before 1401.¹¹¹ Tatlock concludes that the Welsh dragon was probably adopted as a "deliberate counterblast to the English."¹¹²

As an ensign, the dragon can be assumed to be representative of ferocity in battle and perhaps a protector to its bearers. Curiously, the creature's single most straightforward

¹¹¹ Tatlock, p. 228, notes that as early as the later twelfth century dragon, dragwn, draig in Welsh meant "leader, chieftain" but has found no direct connection with the Latin draco.

¹¹² Tatlock, p. 231.

use as a visual sign in the west denotes a meaning more akin to its eastern counterpart, the commonly-thought powerful, but benevolent dragons of China and Japan. The early English were not rallying under signs of Satan or Pride nor even any obscure sense of evil. And the Welsh in the early fifteenth century, with the dragon's Christian symbolism well established, were not brandishing their weapons under banners of the Antichrist. Perhaps they were responding to Isidore's Libyan monster, or perhaps we have not yet cast our net widely enough.

IV

THE DRAGON IN MYTHOLOGY

The overall purpose of this study is, simply, to establish a useful technique for evaluating dragons in medieval literature, especially in medieval English literature. I have defined the traditional medieval perception of the dragon in its natural scientific and theological environments by: (1) examining the development of these monster writings in Chapter II and (2) focusing specifically on the dragon in Chapter III. These sometimes lesser known observations, descriptions and attitudes about the creature need to be emphasized. Quite possibly the English writer's perception of the dragon was heavily influenced by its definition in these slightly obscure, less fictive genres.

At this point, however, one could quite rightly ask, what of the story element? In St. George and the dragon, surely, the influence of the Perseus and Andromeda myth is apparent to all. A hero rescues a maiden offered by a community to appease a sea monster/dragon. Further, the similarity between the Beowulf dragon fight and other Germanic dragon fights cannot be attributed to encyclopedic or bestiary entries. The narrative--not just the characterization of the creature, but the interaction of characters, the story

patterning itself--suggests relationships. Thus, we must consider the possible influence of oral or written folklore and mythology, areas in which the dragon frequently appears.

Unfortunately, this influence is notoriously dangerous to compute. Besides the difficulty involved in calculating the spread of oral material, we also have the problem of deducing the access of particular written material in England roughly between 500 and 1500 A.D. Ogilvy¹ can help only in confirming the availability of Ovid and Vergil, attesting to certain basic familiarity with classical mythology.

What of the mythologies of the Germanic and Celtic peoples who settled in England? Does the archeological evidence of sites such as Sutton Hoo demonstrate a strong influence of Germanic myth? What of the very ancient myths of Egypt and the Near East and the Orient? Do their dragons influence the later English ones and if so, how? The dragon of the Christian mythology of the Middle Ages, a dominant mythology in our western culture, has been examined above, but how does this mythology interact with these ancient ones?

If the question, further, is one of monogenesis or polygenesis of dragon material, how does this affect our understanding of the medieval dragon? This chapter will illustrate

¹ Jack D. A. Ogilvy, Books Known to the English, 597-1066 (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1967).

the numerous parallels present in dragon myths of almost all cultures which could have influenced the English. Whether the dragon motif originated in one area and spread to other cultures or whether each culture responded to some similar need in their mythology to produce a dragon-like creature, does not greatly concern us here, although I would venture to say that the latter is more probable.

The medieval dragon is well removed from its mythological origins; direct lines of transmission are nearly impossible to prove. My concern is for the medieval literary attitude towards the dragon. I believe that some of this very commonplace dragon material found in myths and folktales has necessarily filtered down to individual English writers but a strict sequence of influence would be impossible to establish. The great span of centuries is important to remember. Dragons are found as early as the third millenium B.C.

The development of the dragon motif, as of any other successful motif, is highly complex. Ultimately, the question is how an individual literary artist perceives and exploits such an ancient, common, and, at times, symbolically complicated character in his own particular narrative. Therefore, examination of the dragon in mythology and folklore will help isolate which elements of dragon material became commonplace and which elements are more likely the writer's own. In addition, in many instances, our under-

standing of the creature in medieval writings as the embodiment of evil or the devil, is entirely too simplistic. Superficial reference to mythology has engendered this resultantly signal, not symbolic, interpretive level. Closer attention to the motif's mythological history reveals the diverse fundamental concepts which the dragon represents.

The consequence of this outlook is that the dragon motif suddenly becomes more difficult to interpret in its literary context, but what we lose in clarity, we gain in richness. The evidence in the preceding two chapters must open our eyes both to the dragon's existence as an actual animal in the minds of many in the Middle Ages, and to contrasting symbolical or signal uses of the creature in literature of the time. As that evidence must make us re-examine a particular writer's use of the motif, so too must the mythological and folkloristic evidence about to be presented.

A. Myth--Folklore--Literature

The differentiation of myth, folklore and literature is the subject of many lengthy studies. A brief review of some seminal arguments and those concerned more directly with monsters or the dragon will suffice here. Allowing Eliade to set the groundwork, we see myth as narrating

a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the

deeds of the Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality--an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution . . . the myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a "true history" because it deals with realities.²

As a sacred narrative of beginnings, myth often employs the dragon as Supernatural Being.

Comparing myths to folktales, Eliade asserts that

on the level of "primitive" cultures the distance between myths and tales is less marked than in the cultures in which there is an immense gulf between the "lettered" class and the "people" (as was the case in the ancient Near East, in Greece, in the European Middle Ages). Myths are often blended with tales (and it is nearly always in this condition that ethnologists record them), or again, what has the prestige of myth in one tribe will be merely a tale in the neighboring tribe.³

He shows the determining factor to be one of appreciation (belief) rather than subject matter. He is also suggesting that the less "primitive" culture of the Middle Ages differentiated between myths and tales more than the narratives themselves warranted. Further,

it is not always true that the tale shows a "desacralization" of the mythical world. It would be more correct to speak of a camouflage of mythical motifs and characters; instead of "desacralization" it would be better

² Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963; rpt. 1968), pp. 5-6.

³ Ibid., p. 200.

to say "rank-loss of the sacred." . . . Moreover, if the Gods no longer appear under their real names in the tales, their outlines can still be distinguished in the figures of the hero's protectors, enemies, and companions. They are camouflaged--or, if you will, "fallen"--but they continue to perform their function.⁴

This is a likely explanation for the transference of certain elements of myth to folktale. The elements seem to be primarily subject matter--plot and characters--which have undergone some kind of metamorphosis that necessitates a distinction between myth and tale. How, then, is literature affected by myth and folklore?

Northrop Frye, in his customary method of explication, attacks the problem with successive waves of definition. Once again, lamentably condensing much interesting study, I see Frye's definitions of myth and folktale in harmony with Eliade's. Myth, he maintains, is a type of story involving gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Like the folktale, it is not located in history, but is an abstract story pattern, a ready-made framework which allows a writer to devote his time to elaborating its design. Myths are more serious than folktales; they tell what really happened with exceptional significance in explaining certain features of life-like ritual. They tend to stick together

⁴ Ibid.

more than folktales and build up a larger structure.⁵

In literature, "displacement," according to Frye, means the techniques a writer uses to make his story more credible, logically motivated, or morally acceptable. This dosage of realism clashes with literary "shape," which cannot come from life but from literary tradition--ultimately from myth. Putting works of literature into mythical context gives them reverberating dimensions of significance and they catch the echoes of other literature. Thus, literature as a whole is "displaced" mythology.⁶

Frye has defined a transference of myth to literature as well as a transference of myth to folktale. We turn now to an application of this in the lengthy study of the legend of Perseus by E. S. Hartland. Working backwards for our own purposes from Hartland's conclusions, we learn that St. George's battle with the dragon in literature is derived from the St. George and the dragon legend which itself is derived from the legend of Perseus and Andromeda, evident in many folktales. Finally, these Märchen are derived from a basic myth structure the elements of which are The Supernatural Birth, The Life Token (which does not appear in the

⁵ Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963; originally printed in Daedalus, Summer 1961), p. 30.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

classical legend), The Dragon Slaying (Rescue of Andromeda) and The Medusa-Witch Adventure.⁷ He relates the Rescue of Andromeda to human sacrifice, maintaining that the underlying thought in many cultures is that the monster slain is preternatural and hostile to mankind.⁸

This work concentrates on the movement of myth to legend in folktales. Stress can also be laid on the transference from folklore to literature. The methodology used in illustrating this transference has become a recent issue in literary criticism. One can easily be misled by tracing story patterns to the point of manipulating literary material to fit into set outlines, thus neglecting the individual writer's original design. Daniel Barnes' article on the relationship of Beowulf to the folktale "The Bear's Son" is based on formal folktale morphology.⁹ More illuminating, and cautious, is Rosenberg's response to Barnes' analysis,

⁷ Edwin Sidney Hartland, The Legend of Perseus: A Study of Tradition in Story, Custom and Belief, 3 vols. (London: David Nutt, 1894; rpt. 1972), I, 24.

⁸ Ibid., III, 66.

⁹ Daniel Barnes, "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of Beowulf," Speculum, 45 (1970), 416-34. Basing his morphological study of Beowulf both on Panzer's identification of its origin in "The Bear's Son Tale" and on V. Propp's theory and outline of fairy-tale morphology, Barnes concludes that the germ of Beowulf, despite Klaeber, is in folklore and proceeds to diagram the poem according to folktale morphology.

pointing out the weaknesses in assuming too close a relationship between a piece of literature and a version of a folktale. Rosenberg is fully aware of the benefit of folklore methodology in the study of literature,¹⁰ but insists that it is most important to see that, although Beowulf has folktale elements, its tradition is of literary epic, not folktale. The morphology might "work" but that does not make it equal to the folktale.¹¹

In the controversy over the anthropological approach to literature,¹² characterized by the attempt to concentrate as Barnes said on content not texture,¹³ this study can validly benefit from both sides. Tracing a single motif and its immediate context, not an entire structure of a piece of literature, back to its folklore or mythic stages can be invaluable to the reader in determining which specific

¹⁰ Cf. Bruce A. Rosenberg, "Folklore Methodology and Medieval Literature," Journal of the Folklore Institute, 13 (1966), 311-25.

¹¹ Rosenberg, "Folktale Morphology and the Structure of Beowulf: A Counterproposal," Journal of the Folklore Institute, 11 (1975), 199-209.

¹² The objections to this approach are catalogued in C. S. Lewis' well-known article "The Anthropological Approach," English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wren (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), pp. 219-30.

¹³ Barnes, p. 416. These two terms themselves may be disputed..

embellishments the author has contrived which in turn greatly aid his interpretation of the particular element. Further, a more cautious investigation of the folklore and mythic past of the dragon will force the reader to consider each particular occurrence as a possible alteration or total reversal of the traditional role. Both stances aid in determining the interpretive level and the actual interpretation(s) of the beast.

B. Dragons in Ancient Mythologies

With these more general considerations in mind, let us now accumulate a representative amount of material from myth or folklore concerning the dragon. Quick incomplete accounts of myths and legends are rarely satisfying to a careful investigator into comparative mythology, and the following information only serves to organize the most important examples of the occurrence of the dragon in ancient thought.¹⁴

¹⁴ For interesting, though undocumented, accounts of dragons or dragon-like creatures in early mythologies, see Hogarth or Allen and Griffiths. For a more balanced appreciation of the dragon's role in early myth, a collection like Samuel Noah Kramer's, ed., Mythologies of the Ancient World (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961) is helpful.

References to studies of the dragon in myth and folktale are too numerous to attempt an adequate bibliography here. Much depends on the direction of research. In folklore, an understanding of classification is fundamental. See Aarne-Thompson, The Types of Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography, 2nd rev. ed. (Helsinki, 1961). Various motif indices of Stith Thompson may then be checked, as well as Norma Olin Ireland's Index to Fairy Tales 1949-1972 (West-

Currently the most popular source of western (and perhaps eastern) dragon lore for scholars is the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the enuma eliš, recorded on seven cuneiform tablets. Evidence shows that the Epic was written some time in the first Babylonian Dynasty (2225-1926 B.C.).¹⁵ Briefly, the story is as follows. Before the beginning of the world, Apsû and Tiamat, described as fresh-watery chaos and sea-watery chaos, begat the gods. Some versions explicitly call Tiamat the dragoness of chaos, others let her characteristics (horns, immense size) delineate her. Iconographically, she is often a serpentine figure with two legs. The gods offend their father, Apsû, and before he can follow through in his decision to destroy them--a decision which their mother Tiamat objects to--one of their children murders him. Tiamat seeks redress and spawns monsters to

wood, Mass.: Faxon, 1973), pp. 162-63. Under the dragon entry in the Cleveland Public Library's Dept. of Folklore's Catalogue of Folklore, Folklife and Folksongs, 2nd ed. (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall, 1978) is collected a good selection of both folklore and mythology studies.

The most thorough, heavily documented study of the dragon myth that I have encountered, however, is Joseph Fontenrose's Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

¹⁵ The Babylonian Epic of Creation, ed. S. Langdon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 10. This edition includes the transliteration of the Tablets of Assur, translation and commentary. For the untransliterated text, see Enuma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation, The Cuneiform Text, ed. W. G. Lambert and Simon B. Parker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

help her enact her revenge. The gods take counsel and elect their champion, Marduk, from among them, who agrees to destroy Tiamat in exchange for great power among his fellow gods. Marduk constructs a net to enmesh Tiamat, and marshalls the wind (the Cyclone). He protects his head in a sheen of flames and carries a "plant of extinguishing poison." At the battle, Marduk surrounds her with the net and as Tiamat opens her mouth to swallow him, the raging winds fill her body. Then Marduk pierces her belly with his arrow, binds her and kills her. Her host scatters but are bound in prison along with her monsters. Marduk takes the Tablets of Destiny from Kingu, Tiamat's new consort, to whom she entrusted them. He then divides the corpse of Tiamat and sets one half of her as the heavens and "caused watchmen, not to let her waters come forth." He set the other half as the earth and sea.

At this point there is an astronomical poem describing the movements of the planets and the zodiac. Then, with the blood of the slain Kingu, Marduk creates man. The gods establish a shrine for Marduk in Babylon and subsequently make laws and fix the fate of mankind. The naming of the gods follows.

Different versions prevent a perfect understanding of this myth.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in this very early appearance of

¹⁶ See Fontenrose, pp. 148ff., Samuel Noah Kramer, "Mythology of Sumer and Akkad," in Kramer, pp. 120-26.

the creature, we see the basic elements of the dragon's role in myth, folklore and literature. Much of the material in the preceding three chapters, because of the nature of the medieval genres used in the investigation, deals primarily with the attributes of the dragon, not its role. Some material (the fables and selected bestiary entries, for example) places the dragon in a simple narrative structure. Along with attributes, the connotations of the dragon in specific writings were stressed.

In the study of myth and folklore, however, the roles of the characters become as significant as individual attributes and interpretations. Thus, the combat between the dragon Tiamat and the god Marduk bears great resemblance to dragon fights which appear in later legend and writings. Further, myths, especially creation myths, often represent abstractions by their characters. Here Tiamat, that is, chaos, must be overcome by Marduk before the world can be created, for the world consists of the dragoness of chaos' mutilated body. Note as well that Tiamat is associated with water, the sea and even rain (watchmen hold back her water). Marduk wields the wind, and pierces her with his arrow. He binds her, rescuing his comrades from her scourge and recovers her treasure, the Tablets of Destiny.

Parallels in later, more familiar dragon fights can be seen in the dragon's control of water, or association with it (springs, wells, lakes). The dragon's scourge is a usual

element matching the champion's special armour and weapons against the dragon's poison: the arrow or spear. The victory often involves binding of some sort and even the Tablets of Destiny can be likened to the later treasures.

With this initial myth we already note patterns similar to those found in the Old English Beowulf. Fontenrose categorizes the Grendel and Grendel's dam episodes as the dragon pair theme of a primordial dragon combat myth:¹⁷

More fearful than Grendel himself was Grendel's dam, whom Beowulf had to attack in her underground cavern, and who nearly succeeded in overcoming him, whereas Grendel by comparison was easily destroyed. Here we see the order of Enuma elish, wherein after Apsu's death the more dangerous Tiamat remained, whom Marduk had to meet upon her own ground; and of the Vedas, where after Indra killed Vritra he had to fight Danu; and of the Python myth: Apollo had to deal with the dragoness after he disposed of the dragon. . . . The more one looks at Grendel's dam, the more she looks like Tiamat.¹⁸

After further comparisons of the Grendel and Grendel's dam episodes to the Babylonian Creation Myth (e.g., the misty fen of Beowulf is likened to the watery chaos of the myth), Fontenrose turns to Beowulf's dragon fight, which he does not analyze at length because "the tale runs parallel in many respects"¹⁹ to the Grendel sections.

¹⁷ See below, p. 222, for his theory on the monogenesis of the dragon combat myth.

¹⁸ Fontenrose, pp. 525-26.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 531. See Klaeber's 3rd ed. of Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1950).

We begin to realize that certain themes are commonplace in monster stories, especially those involving dragons or dragon-like creatures. Like Tiamat, the creature is associated with water or lives near it, as Beowulf's dragon does. The dragon, responding to some offence (the murder of Apsû in the Enuma eliš, the theft of the cup in Beowulf) wreaks vengeance. The champion (Marduk, Beowulf) devises special equipment (net, wind, sheen of flames, plant of extinguishing poison in the Enuma eliš, iron shield in Beowulf), and eventually kills the dragon. The champion takes possession of the treasure guarded by the dragon (Tablets of Destiny in the Enuma eliš, gold hoard in Beowulf) and a tribute is offered him by his followers (Babylonian shrine for Marduk, burial mound for Beowulf).

More similarities can be drawn, as well as dissimilarities. In admitting these, we are in no way required to draw from the Babylonian Creation Myth an interpretation for the Old English epic. The process of interpretation is more complex than this, as I hope to demonstrate below. The broad tendencies of dragon mythology, however, should be noted at this time.

These themes, still recognizable in literature and art removed by thousands of years and miles, find counterparts in early, more contemporary mythologies. The themes considered here are only a few of those traced in the detailed comparative studies of folklorists and mythologists. Other dragons

of the Assyrio-Babylonian (Akkadian) extant writings, which derived from Sumerian legends, are Asag, Labbu and Zu.²⁰

Some form of the combat is enacted in these legends. Dragons or dragon-like creatures are conquered by gods.

Ancient Indian myth tells of Ananta, a gigantic many-headed serpent who is never slain because he is an alternative manifestation of Vishnu.²¹ Common also are the nagas, supernatural serpents who carry both good or bad connotations. They are creatures with kings and families similar to the Chinese dragons. Most resembling the Tiamat myth, however, is the story of Vritra, the gigantic serpent who encompassed the waters of chaos and kept them from flowing. The champion of the gods, Indra, a weather god, was in mortal combat with the serpent. After a long battle, Indra vanquishes Vritra, confining him to the outer darkness and chaos surrounding the world. This myth is recorded throughout the Rig Veda (composed probably between 1500 and 1200 B.C., compiled c. 1000 B.C.), establishing Vritra as a major demon of the Indian creation myth.²²

²⁰ Fontenrose, pp. 146ff.

²¹ See Hogarth, pp. 42-45, for illustrations.

²² Because the references are so numerous, I refer the reader to Fontenrose, pp. 194-207, for a detailed account of the myth and documentation. Also see W. Norman Brown, "Mythology of India," in Kramer, pp. 281-89, and Rigveda Samhita, text and commentary and trans. M. P. Pandit and S. Shankaranarayanan, II (India, 1950; rpt. with trans., 1976), 412-13.

Travelling even further east, we find the Chinese dragon flourishing from very ancient times. The familiar eastern dragons, lizard-shaped, horned, whiskered, four-legged, wingless, with four or five claws, often accompanied by a ball or pearl, are generally considered benevolent deities. Harbingers of good luck, they were influenced by the nagas of India which were brought to China by the Buddhists. Many legends can be found about dragon kings and families, usually stressing their power as weather divinities, associated once again with water. Upon aggravation, these powers become destructive.

Sorting through the later legends to discover early creation myths has been a problem in Chinese studies.²³ One flood myth, however, has a dragon-like creature, Kung Kung, who did not prevent floods, in combat with a champion who in some versions defeated him.²⁴ In Chinese folklore, the different kinds of dragon, or lung, are carefully distinguished. So also are the various alchemical and medicinal properties of the creature.²⁵ The role of the dragon in China and Japan varies from the more confined, specialized part it has been assumed to play in western cultures. This assumption will be

²³ See Derk Boddle, "Myths of Ancient China," in Kramer, for an outline of the problem.

²⁴ Fontenrose, pp. 491-98.

²⁵ Hogarth, pp. 49-65; Allen and Griffiths, pp. 34-45.

discussed below.

Oriental dragons developed along different lines, resulting in stories far removed from the medieval English tradition we are ultimately returning to. Closer are the Persian stories of dragon combat iconographically similar to later heroic battles.²⁶

The dragons of combat myths, such as the Babylonian Tiamat or the Indian Vritra greatly vary from the Indian nagas and the Chinese dragons. Here no individual combat or individual creature defines the myth. Dragons or dragon-like creatures are a species more akin to the dragons of the encyclopedias and travel accounts examined in the previous chapters. Although particular stories arose around them, their presence in the mythological world is more ongoing than the combat dragons. Their roles often make them interact more with humans or gods. They are even servants to some, especially in magical contexts.

This particular role of the dragon was not lost to later writings. Pliny's dragons have many medicinal qualities, as in a charm made from a dragon's head and tail which makes

²⁶ See, for example, The Battle of Iskandar with the Dragon, a leaf from a Shah-nama of Firdawsi (known as the Demotte Shah-nama) from Persia, Tabriz, 1330-50 in the Ross Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The illustration shows a mounted hero wielding a sword over the dragon (in this instance, a unicorn-like creature with pheasant wings).

men invincible.²⁷ Siegfried's invulnerability to the dragon's blood is discussed below. Even St. Matthew was forced to deal with two magical dragons as described in the ninth-century Old English Martyrology. While in Ethiopia, "he drove away two sorcerers who worked great magic with two dragons."²⁸ Compare this also to Exodus 7:8ff. where Aaron turns his staff into a serpent for the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh has his sorcerers transform their staffs into serpents/dragons as well (*Proieceruntque singuli virgas suas, quae versae sunt in dracones . . .*), but Aaron's devours the others.

No investigation into very ancient mythologies which affected western thought can be complete without some mention of Egypt's totemism. The serpent Sito was thought to encircle the world. The god Seth took the form of snake, crocodile, or hippopotamus as well as other animals. The story of Apep (Apophis) the giant serpent battling Ra the sun god each night has elements akin to the Tiamat-Marduk combat. As the myth goes,²⁹ Ra and his crew in the sun-boat must battle Apep all night, every night, bind him and cut

²⁷ Pliny, 29:66.

²⁸ "he flymde twegen dryas, þa þar worhton micel scinlac mid twam dracum," in An Old English Martyrology, re-ed. George Herzfeld, EETS, Vol. 116 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), p. 174.

²⁹ See Fontenrose, pp. 185-93, and Donald A. Mackenzie, The Migration of Symbols and Their Relations to Beliefs and Customs (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926).

him to pieces before they can emerge triumphant each morning in the east. Apep can battle Ra during the day as well, in the form of thunderclouds. In later versions, Ra enlisted the aid of Horos for the battle and even the animal-god Seth.³⁰

In a more orderly fashion, we move counter-clockwise around the Mediterranean to the Syro-Palestinian area where we find many Canaanite sources of the Judeo-Christian myths. Mythological texts which circulated around 1400 B.C. were discovered in Ugarit in 1929 revealing creation myths echoed in the Bible.³¹ Baal, god of fertility and rainfall, was in conflict with Yam (the Sea). Fontenrose notes that "either Yam was himself a dragon and had the bynames Lotan (Hebrew Leviathan) and Tannin, or a dragon named Lotan and Tannin was another enemy of Baal, perhaps a henchman of Yam. . . . The dragon that Baal fought had seven heads."³²

Besides the connection with the seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse and the tannin or Leviathan examined in biblical passages in the last chapter, we find further adaptation of the Canaanite myth in Christian mythology. Chapter fourteen of the Book of Daniel is the story of Daniel's

³⁰ Note this early occurrence of the similarity in monster and hero.

³¹ Cyrus H. Gordon, "Canaanite Mythology," in Kramer.

³² Fontenrose, p. 134.

victories over Bel (Baal)--the Babylonian idol whom scholars have associated with Marduk--a dragon, and a den of lions. In order to convince Cyrus of Persia,³³ his new king, not to worship the bronze idol Bel, Daniel, through trickery, proves that the evil priests eat the food laid out for the god and that the god is therefore only a statue. There was also a dragon which the people worshipped,³⁴ whom Daniel again through trickery (fed it a mixture of pitch, fat and hair) caused to burst apart. At this, the Babylonians threw Daniel into the lions' den where he remained unharmed for six days until Cyrus, seeing the miracle, released him.

The Greek version of the story, probably composed between 167 and 163 B.C., is thought to be originally a Jewish story (based on the Baal and Marduk myths), but was not accepted into the Jewish canon in the Council of Jamnia (90 A.D.). This was probably due not to its theological merit, but because it was an obviously later addition.³⁵ Although later

³³ Like Alexander, who participates in both travel accounts and romances, Cyrus ("the Great"--c. 600-529 B.C. or "the younger"--c. 424-401 B.C.) has a name which occurs in different monstrous contexts. Ktesias, who initiated fabulous accounts of the east, was supposedly a physician in the army opposing the Younger Cyrus. See McCrindle, Ktesias, pp. 1-4.

³⁴ "Et erat draco magnus in loco illo, et colebant eum Babylonii." (Dan. 14:22).

³⁵ The Anchor Bible: Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah, the Additions, trans. and comm. Carey A. Moore (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 117-49.

dropped from the Protestant Bible, it was included in the Vulgate and commented upon by the medieval exegetes.³⁶ It is also speculated that Daniel might have been too much of a hero instead of servant of God in this adventure; he prays to God only after six days in the lions' den.³⁷ Further, his successful exploits rely on an Odysseus-like cleverness rather than sanctity. Interesting also is that Daniel must conquer both the dragon (Tiamat, Yam) and the pagan god (Marduk, Baal) in this very early symbolic victory of Judaism over paganism. One interpretation of later saints' lives is that the dragon (alone) represents paganism overcome by the saint.

Although the Old English poetic Daniel does not include the dragon story, the English were well aware of this particular exploitation of the dragon myth in their saints' lives, as may be seen in the Early English Legendary account of St. Michael.³⁸ The story, which perhaps began with the Tiamat-Marduk combat, seems to have evolved into the Yam-Baal

³⁶ See especially the Glossa, IV, 330verso.

³⁷ See Moore, p. 127.

³⁸ "men synguez a-Mizheles-masse-day: In holie church
also / Of one bataille pat seint Mizhel : with a dragun
scholde do: / pat was þe lupere lucifer . . ." in The Early
South English Legendary or Lives of the Saints, ed. Carl
Horstmann, EETS, Vol. 87 (London: N. Trübner, 1887), p. 304.

Caananite myth and later became the seven-headed dragon-archangel Michael story. Even if this evolution cannot be proven, the point remains that the Middle Ages possessed a similar dragon combat attached to one of its most popular saints, as we find in iconographical and literary portrayals of St. Michael.

Later in the Apocalypse of John (20:2) the dragon is bound by the angel for a thousand years and thrown into a pit. Again, this element is unoriginal. Tiamat was bound, and Ra is said to bind Apep every night. The maiden often binds the dragon with her girdle in the saint's life version of the story even when the creature is under control, as the fourteenth-century English account of St. Martha illustrates.³⁹ Note also the curious "Am I the sea or sea monster that you surround and imprison me?" (Job 7:12).⁴⁰

Conversely, the dragon's role as encircler of the world appears in many ancient mythologies. This is yet another role which bears little resemblance to the combat dragon's, but clear distinctions are sometimes hard to make. The

³⁹ "Be best stod stille as a ston, þo he þe crois ysey
And bicom as milde as a lomb · to don as hure wille
Martha it bet sore inou · and euere it stod stile
So þat he[fo] it þreu adoun · and bonde it faste anon
Wiþ hure gurdel harde inou · þat it nemizte a uot gon"
(South English Legendary, pp. 349-50).

⁴⁰ The Vulgate word for sea monster is the problematic cetus. See above, p. 158.

biblical Leviathan may be distantly related to the Egyptian Suto which itself is strikingly similar to the Norse Iormungandr. These likenesses remind us that mythologically the dragon often represented water or the sea. As a water deity, it often was distinct from some kind of storm god or weather/wind god. Although Marduk, the weather god, wields the wind, the Egyptian Apep and Chinese dragons are associated with thunderclouds, preventing a firm formula.

Continuing around the Mediterranean, we find the Hittite myth of the battle of the great Storm-god and the dragon (illuyanka is the Hittite word for dragon, not the creature's proper name).⁴¹ At first the dragon is the victor, but the Storm-god returns to kill him.

With the mythology of the Greeks and Romans we are on somewhat firmer ground. We know that not only was Ovid available in England from at least the seventh century onwards, but that he was the major authority on classical myth for medieval man. A close examination of his Metamorphoses, then, reveals dragons or dragon-like creatures in these episodes:

1. Python (giant serpent) and Apollo (I, 438)
2. Cadmus and serpent (III, 26)
3. Medusa and Perseus, then sea-monster (Andromeda tale) and Perseus (IV, 614)

⁴¹ Hans G. Güterbock, "Hittite Mythology," in Kramer, and Fontenrose, pp. 121-29.

4. Typhon (giant, fire spouting, half serpent) and Jupiter (V, 319)
5. Dragon and Jason (VII, 149)
6. Serpent and Hercules (as a child) (IX, 68)
7. Hydra and Hercules (IX, 69)
8. Sea-monster (Hesione tale) and Hercules (XI, 211)

In addition to dragon combat stories, we should note that Medea has a chariot drawn by winged dragons, steeds sprung from Titans (VII, 350); the goddess Ceres likewise draws her chariot by dragons (VIII, 795).

Just how influential were these stories for the English reader of our era? The tales are quite similar in many respects both to each other and to the other myths and tales mentioned in this chapter. Yet many variances might prevent the reader from associating them all with his image of the dragon. Ovid uses every possible Latin noun to describe the creatures (serpens, coluber, anguis, fera, belua, monstrum, draco).

Moreover, dragon stories are not always of the dragon-hero/god format found in those listed above. The chariot dragons, Ladon, the dragon guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides (IV, 647) and Apollo's son, the golden serpent-god, Aesculapius (XV, 622) all illustrate, once again, an alternate format. Aesculapius, for example, was the famed god of health brought to Rome from the east in the form of a giant serpent to save Rome from pestilence shortly before the end of the Metamorphoses.

Indeed, this metamorphosis recalls the nature and thrust of the entire work. Relying on the Metamorphoses for one's conception of classical myth, one might be led to envision a world of easy and rapid transformations. Besides the lovely Daphne sprouting laurel leaves, the proud Arachne weaving spider webs instead of tapestries, the unfortunate Actaeon displaying tell-tale horns, the reader must note the metamorphosis to inanimate objects. Three characters even change at will (Morpheus, Icelos/Phobetor, Phantasmos, XI, 635), each with his own specialty. Morpheus imitates the human shape, Icelos either bird, beast or serpent, and Phantasmos any kind of rock, water or tree.

Many monsters in the text, then, begin as something else. Cadmus' soldiers spring forth from planted dragon's teeth (III, 102) and Cadmus himself is transformed into a serpent (IV, 564). The blood of the serpent-headed Medusa falls upon the Libyan ground and changes into serpents of many kinds, thus, the reason for Libya's deadly snakes.⁴² The Metamorphoses is also not without its allegorical gods such as Sleep and Hunger. Our modern, comparative perception of the supposed anthropomorphic gods of the Greeks and

⁴² "cumque super Libycas victor penderet harenas,
Gorgonei capitis guttae cecidere cruentae;
quas humus exceptas varios animavit angues,
unde frequens illa est infestaque terra colubris"
(Met., IV, 617-20)

—yet one more explanation for the Libyan dragon.

Romans should not blind us to the more amorphous, totemistic elements still existent in even a sophisticated account such as Ovid's. The lines between man, animal and rock were not so clearly defined: "flat on his back, beneath the mountain, Typhon spews flames and vomits ash from his mouth."⁴³

It should not be surprising, then, since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are looked upon as the aetas Ovidiana, that we find one of the period's mythographers adapting classical tales to Christian mythology. Petrus Berchorius (Bersuire, d. 1365), in his Ovidius moralizatus, equates the story of Jason and the dragon with Christ and Lucifer for the vigilant dragon is Lucifer conquering the golden fleece, i.e., blessed souls.⁴⁴

Ovid's dragon stories can be shown to have much in common with later English ones. A vivid example of this is the Cadmus-Beowulf similarity. In Beowulf, the dragon's lair has a stone arch, and a stream running under it. At the battle, the earth trembles with the breath of the dragon. The creature is described as a coiled thing (hringboga) which

⁴³ "... sub qua resupinus harenas
eiecat flammamque fero vomit ore Typhoeus"
(Met., V, 352-53).

⁴⁴ "draconem vigilem id est luciferum vincens inde
vellus aureum id est sanctarum animarum spoliū reportavit"
(Ovidius moralizatus, Liber XV of Reductorium morale (Utrecht:
Instituut voor Laat Latijn der Rijksuniversiteit, 1962; orig.
printed Paris, 1509), fol. liii, p. 108).

glides (scriðan).⁴⁵ Beowulf's blade fails; the worm crushes his neck, but on the third attack is split through the middle by Beowulf's knife.

These details can be found in Ovid's narrative. Cadmus' men, searching for fresh water for libation, discover in a primeval forest a cave with a stone arch over the entrance and a stream bubbling out. Deep within dwells a giant serpent sacred to Mars with a golden crest, fire flashing from its eyes and a body swollen with venom. Upon hearing Cadmus' men, the snake twists its scaly coils in knots, crushes some of the men in a rapid attack, slays some with its fangs, and stifles others with its poisonous breath.

Cadmus, finding his companions slaughtered, gives a short speech announcing to the corpses that he will avenge their death or be a comrade in it, and then heaves a massive stone at the serpent. The serpent is protected by its scaly skin, but in a second attack, Cadmus pierces the middle of its back with a javelin. The snake is irate. The earth resounds with its scraping scales (terraque rasa sonat squamis); it coils into huge spirals (ipse modo immensum spiris facientibus orbem cingitur) and attacks a third time. This time Cadmus impales the creature against an oak tree, thus killing it.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Beowulf, l. 2561.

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Met.*, III, ll. 26-94. See also F. Wild's comparison in "Drachen im Beowulf und andere Drachen," Sitzungs-

Moving further north, we find that helpful studies on the dragon fight in Germanic tales are available.⁴⁷ Emil Ploss traces the Sigurð/Siegfried legend back to late antique dragons, following themes such as vulnerability and treasure-guarding, and finds the germ of the eventual separate developments of the South Germanic parallel versions already visible in the fifth and sixth centuries. After establishing the typology of the monster fight, he shows that this particular dragon motif comes together in literature about 800 A.D.⁴⁸ This is a simplification of Ploss' detailed study which somewhat clarifies the peculiar branching of the Sigurð/Siegfried tale, which is the prominent dragon legend in Germanic lore.

We note the early occurrence of the story in what amounts to a brief reference in the Middle High German epic the Nibelungenlied (c. 1200). Hagen, who later causes Siegfried's death, tells the story to the Burgundian court before the hero arrives to warn them that not only is he invulnerable,

berichte der österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Kl. 238 (Vienna, 1962), no. 5.

⁴⁷ See Emil Ploss, Siegfried-Sigurd, der Drachenkämpfer: Untersuchungen zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage (Köln Graz: Böhlau, 1966), and Ernst Siecke, Drachenkämpfe (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1907). For a listing of some folktale motifs, see Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature, ed. Inger M. Boberg, in Bibliotheca Arnarnagana, XXVII (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966), 38-39.

⁴⁸ Ploss, pp. 112ff.

but that he has killed the two Nibelung brothers and gained possession of the magic cloak and fabulous treasure. Later in the poem the Burgundians (Gunther and his court) are referred to as the Nibelungs.

Hagen says:

And I recall one other thing I knew:
Once there was a dragon Sigfrid slew,
And bathed himself in his blood. His skin was turned
To horn no blade will cut, as many have learned.⁴⁹

The dragon is called lintrachen from lint, an obsolete word somewhat equivalent to the German Schlange and from the loan word drache (originally from the Latin draco).⁵⁰

The tale is also found, somewhat transformed in the Old Norse Poetic Edda, composed perhaps between 900 and 1050: the chief extant manuscript, Codex Regius,⁵¹ has been dated c. 1300. Here, Siegfried is Sigurð and the dragon has a

⁴⁹ Trans. Frank G. Ryder, The Song of the Nibelungs: A Verse Translation from the Middle High German Nibelungenlied (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), p. 58. The text is as follows:

"Noch weiz ich an im mære, daz mir ist bekant
einen lintrachen den sluoc des heldes hant.
er badet' sich in dem bluote; sîn hût wart hûrnîn
des snidet in kein wâfen; daz ist dicke worden scîn"
(Das Nibelungenlied, ed. Karl Bartsch and Helmut de Boor (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1956), stanza 100).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵¹ See Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds., Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst Verwandten Denkmälern (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962), Fáfnismál, pp. 180-88.

history and is named Fáfnir; the treasure is directly connected with the dragon, and Sigurð gains knowledge of the language of animals from eating Fáfnir's heart, whereas Siegfried gained the "horned" invulnerability by bathing in the creature's blood.

Despite these discrepancies, the stories are obviously related, with the Norse versions more expanded. Sigurð's involvement with Fáfnir is foreshadowed in the Poetic Edda in the Gripispó, but the story is laid out in the successive Reginismál, Fáfnismál, and Sigrdrífumál. The most interesting section of this account is the dialogue between Sigurð and his soon-to-die victim, Fáfnir. Here the dragon (once a man) has not only a voice, but wisdom, and warns Sigurð about the treachery of his companion Regin.

The story is clearly told in Snorri Sturluson's Edda (c. 1225) in the Skáldskaparmál 47(39), 48, 57 and 71.⁵² Through an error on Loki's part, Hreidmarr and his sons Regin and Fáfnir acquire a cursed treasure. The sons kill their father for the gold, whereupon Fáfnir, sending Regin away, takes full possession, turns himself into a dragon (ormr) and lies on the hoard.⁵³ Regin plots with Sigurð to get revenge

⁵² Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel-Nordisk Forlag, 1931).

⁵³ "en Fáfnir for vpp a Gnitaheiði ok gerði sér þar bol ok braz iorms líki ok lagðiz agvllit" (Jónsson, p. 129).

and the gold; he makes Sigurð a special sword and sends him after Fáfnir. Sigurð kills Fáfnir and Regin, after drinking Fáfnir's blood, falls asleep. Sigurð, while roasting the heart of the dead dragon, accidentally touches the blood to his mouth; he then hears the birds warn him of Regin's intention to kill him. Sigurð kills Regin, packs up the treasure and rides off to other adventures. It is significant that in both stories--in the Middle High German and in the Old Norse--the cursed treasure is the eventual bane of the hero.

One further reworking of the story that should be mentioned is the Volsunga Saga (before 1260), probably written in Iceland; the oldest manuscript is 1400. One of the Fornaldarsögur (Sagas of Ancient Times), it is set in the far off past with more romantic and supernatural elements than the later Family Sagas dealing with the recent past (930-1030).⁵⁴ This version has a few changes but is largely a prose translation of the Poetic Edda.

The relationship between these Germanic tales is beyond the scope of this study. It is, after all, only one kind of dragon occurrence in Germanic literature. The concentration on this hero-dragon fight might blind us to other dragons closer to the mythological centre of these cultures. The

⁵⁴ See The Saga of the Volsungs, ed. and trans. R. G. Finch (London: Nelson, 1965).

Poetic Edda, for instance, mentions the dreki fliugandi (flying dragon) which is Níðhogggr, the giant serpent which lives under Yggdrasil, the tree of life, with his monstrous cohorts, gnawing at the roots until the day the tree crashes down.⁵⁵

Another Norse dragon-like creature, likened to Leviathan, is Iormungandr, the mighty serpent which surrounds the world. Snorri does not stop with Fáfnir in listing serpents. He includes dreki, iormungandr (mighty monster), naðr (adder), Níðhavgr, linr (lindworm), naðra (she-adder), góin, móin, Grafvitnir, Grábakr, Ófnir, Sváfnir (all serpents which live under Yggdrasil with Níðhogggr) and grímr (hooded one).⁵⁶

Besides the dragon-fight Sigurð episode and these more obscure mythical dragons, we must also consider the dragons and serpentine creatures which inhabit later sagas. In collecting analogues for the Old English Beowulf, scholars have unearthed many such stories.⁵⁷ If not as useful as

⁵⁵ Neckel, Völuspá, stanza 66.

⁵⁶ Jónsson, Skáldskaparmál, p. 74.

⁵⁷ See A. Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf and Grettis Saga," in Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 184ff.; Nora K. Chadwick, "The Monsters and Beowulf," in The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture, Presented to Bruce Dickins on His 70th Birthday, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes, 1959), pp. 171-203; and G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson, Beowulf and Its Analogues (London: J. M. Dent, 1968).

hoped in explaining the use of the monstrous in the much earlier English epic, these stories of cat-like ketta, winged trolls and dragon families still bear witness to the medieval perception of the creature.

Before leaving Germanic mythology and folklore, I must mention the Latin work whose dragon passages have been thought to be influential on subsequent tales. Saxo Grammaticus' Danish History (c. 1200) records a story about Frotho who succeeds Hadingus the king of Denmark. Merely hearing of a dragon and treasure, Frotho covers himself well to protect himself from the beast's venom, manages to kill it and acquire the treasure. Similarly, in a later book, Fridlevus, hearing about a dragon and treasure in a dream, sets out well-covered to protect himself from the venom, kills the dragon and obtains the treasure.⁵⁸

In later Norse folktales and in this Danish pseudo-history, the dragon combats are functioning merely as highly demanding challenges for heroes. We are now well into the Middle Ages with this material. Centuries of sympathetic treatment of the monstrous are evident in the dragon's role. Eliade's "rank loss of the sacred" has assuredly taken place in these stories; Frotho in no way battles all the forces of

⁵⁸ Saxonis Grammatici, Gesta Danorum, ed. Alfred Holder (Strassburg: Trübner, 1886), II, 38-39; VI, 180-81.

chaos.. An English gnomic verse, thought to be composed much earlier than the mid-eleventh-century manuscript on which it is found, handles the motif in a disarmingly perfunctory manner:

The mast, the sail-yard, will be at rest on the beak of the ship. The sword, noble iron, will be on the bosom. The dragon, old, proud of his treasures, will be in the barrow. The fish in the water will beget its kind. The king in the hall will give out rings. The bear, old and terrifying, will live on the heath. . . .⁵⁹

The creature, its mythological habitat (a mound or cave) and its mythological function (guarding treasure) all seem to be amalgamated quite easily into Anglo-Saxon natural and cultural definitions. Ship-masts and swords are at rest. The dragon is safely in its den. Fish go on with the business of procreation, the bear grows old in the wild, and, significantly, the king will proceed with his major peace-time occupation: the often-sung doling out of rings.

Even if we interpret this dragon line as a convenient symbolic statement for a peaceful situation, its context

59 " . . . Mast sceal on ceole,
segelgyrd seomian. Sweord sceal on bearme,
drihtlic isern. Draca sceal on hlæwe,
frod, frætsum wlanc. Fisc sceal on wætere
cynren cennan. Cyning sceal on healle
beagas dælan. Bera sceal on heaðe,
eald and egesfull . . ."

(in Anglo Saxon Minor Poems, ed. E. Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), Maxims II, p. 56, ll. 24-30).

reveals the dragon's "rank loss." It is now an animal, like the fish or bear, remaining where it belongs, performing its peaceful role. At most, it is no threat to men. The sword is not drawn against it; the king is not concerned with it and its treasure lies untouched.

The motif, still successful, has acquired a less intense connotation. This shift cannot be historically traced to one particular era. The fable of the Fox and the Dragon,⁶⁰ as early as, perhaps earlier than, the first century A.D., illustrates a similar offhand attitude to the once consummately powerful creature as do many medieval romances. Malory's fifteenth-century narrative tells of a dragon which Lancelot is asked to subdue after rescuing the fair Elaine. The combat neatly and unspectacularly occupies very few lines:

Soo whan sir Lancelot had lyffte up the tombe
there came oute an orryble and a fyendely dragon
spyttynge wylde fyre oute of hys mowthe. Than sir
Lancelotte drew his swerde and faught wyth that
dragon longe, and at the laste wyth grete payne
sir Lancelot slew that dragon.⁶¹

And Lancelot blithely rides off to other adventures.

The Celts settling in the British Isles also had a tradition of dragon tales. Looking very briefly at one of

⁶⁰ See above, p. 17.

⁶¹ Malory, Works, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; rpt. 1977), pp. 478-79, Bk. XI, 1.

them, we are introduced to the Geste of Fraoch (found in the Book of the Dean of Lismore and Táin Bó Fráich).⁶² The prose version has Fraoch, the most beautiful hero of Erin and Alba, in love with Find-abair, whose parents plot to kill him by making him swim across a pool inhabited by a sea monster to retrieve a rowan branch. The monster seizes Fraoch, but Find-abair swims to him with a sword to help him. Fraoch kills the monster with the sword and after still more complications with the reluctant parents, wins Find-abair.

The poetic version has Fraoch mac Idad trying to retrieve the magical-medicinal rowan branch to save Find-abair's dying mother. This time, the dragon-snake is sleeping around the tree. Fraoch successfully steals the berries but must return for the branch of the tree. The dragon awakes and attacks Fraoch. Find-abair tries to come to the rescue with a knife, but is too late and both hero and dragon die.

Another dragon story has many earmarks of a traditional folktale. Called the Celtic Dragon Myth, it is a combination of The Fisher, The Mermaid and The Gray Lad and is overrun with giants, maidens, treasures, magic and persistent trebling of motifs. The dragon section concerns the first son (the

⁶² Both the story of Fraoch and the Mermaid-Dragon myth can be found translated in The Celtic Dragon Myth, collected by J. F. Campbell (19th c.), and trans. George Henderson (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911). See also Die Romanze von Froech und Findabair: Táin Bó Fróich, ed. Wolfgang Meid (Innsbruck, 1970), for text.

Gray Lad) of a fisherman off on an adventure, who takes it upon himself to rescue the king's daughter, left on the beach as an offering to the three-headed sea monster. He cuts off a head a day, disappears, and finally proves that he is the slayer with the help of the princess whom he, of course, marries.

The connections between these tales and more familiar medieval and ancient dragon tales are obvious. One further story, the possible Welsh source of the early Arthurian material, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Before leaving this rapid survey of the dragon in other cultural traditions, we might venture one step further west to the plumed serpent of the tales and art of the early American peoples. Both the Mayans and the Mexicans told stories of a Gucumatz/Kulkulcun or Quetzalcoatl who was often represented as a giant plumed serpent.⁶³

In a detailed comparison of these recurring themes, Joseph Fontenrose advanced the theory that certain of the stories related here derived from some single myth. This unknown myth was similar to the Babylonian Creation Myth. Fontenrose's method was to identify certain themes (similar, but not identical to Stith Thompson's) inherent in the Python-Apollo myth and to apply them to the dragon stories found in

⁶³ Fontenrose, pp. 504-14; Allen and Griffiths, pp. 57-61.

other cultures to determine association. His results showed that the dragon combat myth (not all dragon myths) produced not only the Python, but the Typhon, Perseus, Cadmus, and Herakles myths in classical lore. The Theseus and Jason stories are not directly related to the "Great Combat Myth." He found further associations with the Babylonian Tiamat, the Canaanite Yam and the Egyptian Set stories. These themes were probably brought to Greece and Rome through the Hittite illuyanka myth.⁶⁴ In his appendices, Fontenrose applied the themes successfully to the stories of Judith and Holofernes in the Beowulf manuscript,⁶⁵ the Sigurð/Siegfried tale and both the Grendel and dragon battles in Beowulf. He finds the pattern present in certain Chinese, Japanese and early American tales, but makes no definite decision on their relationship to the Great Combat Myth.

To put all this in perspective, we must remember that the dragon combat myth is only one (albeit prominent) of several dragon myths. Others may have dragons drawing chariots, dragons encircling the earth, dragons in families, dragons heralding rain or good fortune, or dragons used for

⁶⁴ Fontenrose, p. 217.

⁶⁵ Interesting, in light of Sisam's theory on the Beowulf manuscript as a monster treatise. See Kenneth Sisam, "The Compilation of the Beowulf Manuscript," Studies in the History of Old English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 65-96.

medicinal purposes. Even if we concentrate on the dragon's part in the Great Combat Myth, Fontenrose warns in his conclusion that we are dealing with myth and that the champion is often the duplicate of his opponent, neither good nor bad.⁶⁶ Assuming, then, that even a portion of his findings hold true, we discover that the "evil dragon" is but a sub-type of this combat myth. It is the one which became most popular in the west, but the dragon's traditions allow and sometimes demand, a much broader interpretation of the creature. The English dragon is no exception.

C. The Origin of the Dragon

No theory on the origin of the dragon has been proposed to the satisfaction of all. Further, a fairly convincing origin would do little to enrich our understanding of the dragon in a piece of literature composed many centuries later, written by someone who is likely as ignorant of the origin of his motif as we are today. Many interesting studies of the dragon, however, conclude in hypothetical statements on origin, and a cursory look at these will provide a fuller picture of the dragon's rôle in mythology.

Since the dragon's history goes back to a time before written records, an art historian would probably have the

⁶⁶ Fontenrose, p. 470.

firmest authority for speculations on origin. M. I. Rostovtzeff's study of animal styles in early art begins by pointing out that the animal style seems to be the oldest style in the decorative art of mankind.⁶⁷ As early as the third millenium B.C., we find, among other creations, the invention of fantastic animals in Sumer and Elam. The most prominent are the lion-griffin (head of lion, body of eagle), the eagle-griffin (head of eagle, body of lion), the dragon (head of snake or wolf-like being with open mouth, large teeth and extremities of a lion or eagle) and various combinations of human and lion or bull. Similar developments are apparent in Egypt at this time, but scholars think they are derivative from the Mesopotamian styles.⁶⁸

Rostovtzeff's work with South Russian artifacts concludes that a predilection for real animals was introduced by the conquering Scythians, replacing the delight in fantastic creatures which characterized that region in the early centuries (seventh and sixth centuries B.C.). By the fifth or fourth centuries, the dragon was adopted from the Ionians, who had previously taken over the Mesopotamian styles. The dragon motif grew popular in art at this time. Rostovtzeff also notes that the animal style is the most typical feature

⁶⁷ Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff, The Animal Style in South Russia and China (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), p. 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

of the Chinese Chou dynasty (1125?-250 B.C.). The eagle-griffin and dragon are of the same style as those found in the Near East, even though these artifacts are much later than the Mesopotamian ones. A common origin of these two styles of fantastic animal art may be discovered, or we may find that the Near East dragon was transmitted to the Far East or even vice versa. Also possible are independent origins in these two regions.⁶⁹ Whichever theory proves true, we know that the creature was present in the artistic imaginations of Mesopotamian people as early as the third millenium B.C.

Why such early occurrences of the beast? Frazer lists two contrasting interpretations of the dragon myth common in so many cultures. The myth might be: (1) totemistic in the sense that the serpent or dragon is the sacred animal or totem of the royal house or (2) cosmological in the sense that the dragon stood for certain cosmological phenomena, whether moisture or drought, cold or heat, winter or summer.⁷⁰ If the dragon is a central character in a nature myth, exemplifying changes in weather or season, we can understand its early origin. Similarly, if the dragon-hero conflict is

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

⁷⁰ J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 3rd ed. IV (London: MacMillan, 1911), 105-13.

the embodiment of a particular kingly or tribal assertion of power (where the dragon is slain) or shift of power (usually where the dragon is victor), we can also see the likelihood of an ancient origin. If the myth is the personification of physical phenomena, then it could have originated in a "chaos to cosmos" theme evident in the Tiamat-Marduk myth where the dragon's death is the necessary precedent to the beginning of the world. Perhaps originally these rites were performed religiously, and later they developed into a celebration of man's control over his world.

G. E. Smith, in The Evolution of the Dragon, examines both the possible origin of the creature and the development of its connotations. He maintains that the dragon is associated with almost every god but most intimately and decisively with the Egyptian trinity of Hathor (the Great Mother), Osiris (the Water God) and Horus (the Warrior Sun God). The dragon has represented them both collectively and independently. Curiously, the dragon-slayer is also thus represented.⁷¹

The fundamental element in the dragon's power, however, is its control of water. As the manifestation of Osiris, the Water God, its good aspects are stressed. But "when the attributes of the Water God became confused with those of

⁷¹ Grafton Elliot Smith, The Evolution of the Dragon (Manchester: University Press, 1911), pp. 77-78.

the Great Mother, and her evil avatar, the lioness (Sekhet) form of Hathor in Egypt, or in Babylonia the destructive Tiamat, became the symbol of disorder and chaos, the dragon became identified with her also."⁷² Smith, then, stresses the Egyptian influence on the crucial development of the western dragon.

Taking a slightly different approach, Hartland, in tracing the Perseus and Andromeda myth, speculates that in ancient civilizations, gods would be zoomorphic and in days of festival or when the people were under the stress of some great impending calamity, they would not hesitate to give human sacrifice. The story of Perseus saving Andromeda from the sea-monster, then, can be looked upon as perhaps originating in some kind of religious reformation.

If, by the concurrence of an advance in civilization and a political revolution, the worship of any such divinity were suppressed, he would become in tradition a deadly monster, and the milder divinity who succeeded to his place in popular regard would be credited with his conquest and destruction.⁷³

Hartland could not identify the specific civilization.

⁷² Ibid., p. 78. To be accurate, Tiamat is not the earliest Mesopotamian dragon-like creature. Babylonian mythology owes much to the Sumerian culture which tells the story of Ninurta (later Marduk) who destroys Kur (the Sumerian word for underworld), the monster who held back the waters. See Allen, pp. 18-19.

⁷³ Hartland, III, 68.

In a more narrowly defined study,⁷⁴ Martin Nilsson attempts to trace the dragon on the treasure motif back to the engraved serpent on the money chest of Aesculapius. This early treasure chest had a slot wherein the suppliant was expected to deposit his offering to the health god. Aesculapius is often associated with the serpent and Nilsson's study successfully shows the possible connection between this serpent and certain dragons. Still, the dragon's rich mythological heritage, involving diverse treasure-like possessions guarded by the creature (for example, the Tablets of Destiny), leads one to believe that the dragon on the treasure is as ancient as the creature itself. The Aesculapius association is perhaps just one more illustration of the motif, not the origin of it. The problem of distinguishing between the dragon and the serpent becomes central in this argument. Aesculapius' traditional serpent evolves into the reptilian winged dragon in a Macrobius passage, or so it seems. If not conclusive proof of Nilsson's theory, it warns us not to be too quick in distinguishing between the draco and the serpens. We find, in his fifth-century Satyricon, that Macrobius attributes the etymology of the word draco (which he uses to describe the emblem of the god), i.e., "to see," to the creature's keen eyesight. For this reason, it

⁷⁴ Martin P. Nilsson, "The Dragon on the Treasure," Opuscula Selecta: Linguis Anglica, Franco-Gallica, Germanica Conscripta, III (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1960), 116-24.

is entrusted with the duty of guarding temples, shrines, oracles and treasures.⁷⁵ Although not referred to as draco, Aesculapius' giant serpent form in the Metamorphoses certainly approaches the monstrous.

An unusual speculation on the origin of the St. George and the dragon myth appeared in Sabine Baring-Gould's Curious Myths of the Middle Ages. The chapter on St. George states that the fight with the dragon is common to all the Aryan peoples.⁷⁶ Comparing various analogous myths, Baring-Gould adds that

when we perceive how popular this venerable myth was in heathen nations of Europe, it is not surprising that it should perpetuate itself under Christianity, and that, when once transferred to a hero of the new creed, it should make that hero one of the most venerated and popular of all the saints in the calendar.⁷⁷

The most "curious" part of this myth, the dragon fight, is not included in earlier versions and Baring-Gould speculates that the legend might originally have been built up around George because of a misunderstanding of an encomium

⁷⁵ "... esse autem draconem inter praecipua solis argumenta etiam nominis fictione monstratur, quod sit nuncupatus ἀπό τοῦ δέρμεν id est uidere, nam ferunt hunc serpentem acie acutissima et peruigili naturam sideris huius imitari atque ideo aedium adytorum oraculorum thesaurorum custodiam draconibus adsignari" (Macrobius, Saturnalia, I, 20, 3).

⁷⁶ Sabine Baring-Gould, Curious Myths of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Rivingtons, 1877), p. 304.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 311.

made in memory of St. George by Metaphrastes, wherein he speaks figuratively of George's victory over the clever dragon, i.e., the devil--as any saint undergoing tortures might be described.⁷⁸

Besides throwing light on the obvious dragon fight additions to later saints' lives, this conjecture is noteworthy in another way.⁷⁹ It also may demonstrate the situation in which a medieval adaptation of the dragon motif occurs because of an interpretation previously attributed to the creature, rather than the situation in which an interpretation naturally stems from a legend originally containing a dragon. In this example, the dragon/devil association is probably from the Apocalyptic story. Because the story of George needed a powerful symbol to represent the devil, the dragon was conjured up. Whether accidentally, or not, the dragon then became part of the narrative, which gathered details over the centuries from at least one of its obvious sources, the Andromeda and Perseus tale. Eventually the narrative had become so strong that it did not appear tampered with nor subsequent to the interpretation of the story, which is, in this instance, St. George, a Christian soldier, vanquishing the devil.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 301.

⁷⁹ For more on dragons in saints' lives, see next chapter.

Although I am not fully convinced that this is indeed what occurred in the evolution of this legend, the argument is significant in that the St. George and the dragon legend influenced later saints' lives. If the dragon in many saints' lives developed from this interpretation rather than from legends surrounding the individual saints, then our own reading of the literature can be affected. But this question is to be discussed in the next chapter.

An old and peculiar theory on the origin of the dragon is voiced in Carl Sagan's Dragons of Eden. Dragons are possibly the dinosaurs of our distant past. Belief in their existence was perpetuated by either chance encounters with species that escaped extinction until later or by explanations of fossils found by early man. Racial memories kept alive the animosity between the carnivorous species and man in the form of the legendary dragon fight.⁸⁰

The last speculation I turn to does not bear directly on the origin of the dragon, but demonstrates forcibly the origin of many other creatures in the dragon and, therefore, emphasizes the influence and antiquity of the creature. We

⁸⁰ Carl Sagan, The Dragons of Eden: Speculations of the Evolution of Human Intelligence (New York: Random House, c. 1977), pp. 140-42. Sagan asks whether the terror dragons evoked in our protohuman ancestors might have helped bring about the evolution of human intelligence. "Or does the metaphor of the serpent refer to the use of the aggressive and ritualistic reptilian component of our brain in the further evolution of the neocortex?"

are also coming back full circle to the relationship of myth, folktales and literature, essential to a comprehensive dragon study. After his extensive research on the fairy tales⁸¹ of Russia, Vladímir Propp, in his historic Morphology of the Folktale, informs us of the fundamental role of the dragon in the fairy tale:

If we were to devote a special investigation to this question, it would be possible to construct the archetype of the fairy tale, not only schematically, as we do here, but concretely as well. . . . Rejecting all local, secondary formations, and leaving only the fundamental forms, we shall obtain that one tale with respect to which all fairy tales will appear as variants. The investigations we have carried out in this regard have led us to those tales in which a dragon kidnaps a princess, in which Iván meets a witch, obtains a steed, flies away, vanquishes the dragon with the help of the steed, returns, is subjected to pursuit by she-dragons, meets his brothers, etc.⁸²

What does the dragon's integral place in the development of a large number of folktales tell us? I think it warns us, as does this excursion into the well-populated world of mythological dragons, that in explicating and evaluating the creature as it occurs in medieval literature,

⁸¹ Fairy tales are folktales with supernatural characters. See Aarne-Thompson. Under "Ordinary Folktales" the section "Tales of Magic" (nos. 300-749) is the division of tales referred to by Propp.

⁸² Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed., rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner (American Folklore Society, 1968; rpt. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 89.

we must remember that we are dealing with a motif which has been exercised by most cultures for many many centuries prior to the Middle Ages. In addition, the dragon has often been used to express very basic and powerful changes. The dragon motif, in capable hands, has the potential of echoing certain strains of these ancient stories.

Which stories, what resonances are to be found in those monster references in medieval manuscripts? The problem is complex and permits only speculative solutions. We must properly interpret the creature in light of its immediate environment, its mythological and, perhaps, its poetic intonations. Most interpretations must remain conjectural, of course. Dragons exist in medieval writings; our culture has forgotten many implications of the creature, and we must now regain some of the reasons for its formerly dominant position in narratives so that we may comprehend its unique medieval meanings.

D. Adaptation of the Motif to Medieval Literature

The medieval English dragons of Beowulf, saints' lives and romances belong primarily to the world of literature and abide by its rules. If their context shows them to be animals, even intentionally fabulous ones, with no particular appeal for additional meanings, then we must, by rights, leave them at this interpretive level. We can find sources,

acknowledge influences, mythological or otherwise, admire imaginative powers, but the creatures remain unsymbolic.

Some dragons, however, in fictive genres of medieval writings do allow additional meanings without forsaking the creature's animal presence in the narrative. With this symbolic level of interpretation, then, we can eagerly explore possible sources, compare myths and folktales, bestiaries and exegesis, and acknowledge influences. We know that connotations can be borrowed as well as plot or character details. With symbolic dragons, the two-fold task is to decide: (1) how the dragon as character might have been influenced by the evidence presented in these last three chapters and (2) how its interpretation might be influenced. Borrowings of one kind do not necessarily presuppose borrowings of the other.

Or, when a dragon seems to appear out of nowhere, heavy with portent, but with no real existence in the narrative, we should admit a signal level of interpretation and proceed with similar investigations into influences which might help determine meaning. Here, the influences are even more pertinent than in the symbolic level because the relationship of a sign to its meaning must be previously known to make the sign effective.

If, then, we conclude that the writer of a particular English work seems to be using the dragon as a symbol or sign and that he is exploiting, consciously or not, certain

mythological or folkloristic details or connotations, we must perpetually remember that the rules of literature still hold. A further process beyond the rank loss between myth and folktale has occurred. Klingender, in Animals in Art and Thought, talks about this process in terms of disenchantment.⁸³ The beast magic of primitive tribes becomes the beast symbol with the emergence of the "rational" man who is in control of his emotional and spiritual environment. The best symbols were originally the best magic before the process of disenchantment. His example of early disenchantment of the beast motif is the fifth-century B.C. fable where the animal takes on human characteristics. Portrayed in an everyday manner, the animal motif clearly has become a literary device for presenting certain concepts, in this instance, human foibles, in a forceful, memorable and entertaining way.

Even when a writer appears compelled to use the dragon motif since the source reveals that it is a traditional component of the story, we must determine how much the writer wishes to make out of this component. If we decide he was influenced by a mythological dragon, we must be careful not to rely too heavily on one particular myth and one particular interpretation of it.

Here extreme care is imperative. The dragon appears in so many myths and folktales, often with very similar charac-

⁸³ Klingender, pp. 86ff.

teristics and role and yet often with contrasting connotations. A simple comparison of, say, an English romance and a Canaanite myth, can never be relied upon for conclusive proof of a writer's purpose. The attitude of the English of this period towards the dragon was not as straightforward as we might like to think.

The strange alchemical symbolism of the dragon will suffice as one last warning. As with other animals in their secretive language, the dragon serves as a symbol to the alchemists for a state of matter or a particular substance. "The green dragons and white and red lions were, at the same time, material substances and visionary figures."⁸⁴ The creature's prima materia role in the process of producing gold suggests a symbolic handling of the motif which greatly broadens the good/evil combat dragon interpretation which has dominated our understanding of the motif for many years. Thus, with this general survey of the dragon in mythology and the limitations of its use in literary analysis, we turn more directly to its occurrence in medieval English literature.

⁸⁴ Cottie Arthur Burland, The Arts of the Alchemists (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 71. This book is especially useful for its illustrations of dragons found in later alchemical works. See also John Read, Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy, Its Literature and Relationships (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1936; rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

THE DRAGON IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

A. Introduction

The previous chapters are intended to clarify for the modern reader the medieval perception of the dragon. The system of delegating the occurrences to the levels of animal, symbol and sign relies on this medieval perception, and relates the motif to a literary procedure. I find no tension between medieval and modern rhetorical rules in employing this system. Although I follow no historically authoritative organization of figures, I believe the range of material in terms of time, geography, intent and style validates my animal, symbol and sign categorization.

The richest and most complex level is, of course, that of symbol. Since few writers exploit the symbolic dragon to the extent to which the Beowulf poet does, I will reserve my comments for this most serious and successful use of the motif until later.

Our difficulty in understanding the dragon's significance in English literature arises in part out of the historical evolution of the motif. Century after century of use resulted in a gradual shifting from the symbolic level with

its multiple meanings and its retention of animality to the signal level with its one clear meaning and little attention to the dragon as animal. Of course, all three levels (animal, symbol and sign) did exist simultaneously in history, but the general tendency was for the symbolic level to give way more and more to the level of sign. The emblematic nature of Renaissance motifs embraced the dragon theme and furthered the evolution. Today we are most comfortable with the dragon-as-sign, for even the dragon-as-animal level deteriorated with the advent of science. Although it occurred late (not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries),¹ the knowledge that dragons had no existence in the real world did become commonplace, and the motif became effective on the level of sign, the animal level disbelieved and relegated to children's stories, the symbolic level severely handicapped because of its loss of status.

The shift from symbol to sign is a natural development for any metaphor or symbol. The dragon motif follows faith-

¹ Books like Henkel and Schöne's Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI und XVII Jahrhunderts (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche, 1967) show how easily the dragon theme was incorporated into a system of emblems. Early Renaissance works of Konrad Gesner, Lycosthenes (Conrad Wolffhart), Ambroise Paré, Ulisse Aldrovandi and the Englishman Edward Topsell were the last flush of the monster encyclopedia and travel tradition before more sober works, among them Sir Thomas Browne's Vulgar Errors, ended such monstrous speculations. See Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 5 (1942), 159-97, for synopsis and editions.

fully the pattern of a tensive-symbol. A "tensive" symbol is one which is not altogether exact, one which is alive, drawing on a multiplicity of associations. This tensive symbol, then, over time becomes a steno-symbol, or in my terms, a sign. The "steno" symbol is one which is not as "alive" as the tensive symbol, one which is shared exactly in the same way by a large number of people. All language becomes steno or closed by habit.² The dragon becomes "evilness" by its continued link to this meaning. This particular motif, although present in every era, flourished in the Middle Ages not only in literature, but also in the plastic arts. The dragon's development was closely aligned with the general monster tradition; as explained in Chapter II, the dragon was a member of the large number of monsters which the Middle Ages patronized.

Thus, if we summarize (as Klingender does in Animals in Art and Thought),³ the development of western medieval art

² A complete discussion of these definitions is found in Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 33-94. Wheelwright's thesis is that tensive symbols (found in all great literature) are closer to reality because the tensive character of true mimesis reflects the inexactitude of reality. Hence, we may discern a greater "truth" in the dragon used as tensive symbol (as in Beowulf) than the dragon used more perfunctorily as steno-symbol (sign).

³ Ed. Evelyn Antal and John Hartham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971). The entire thrust of Klingender's detailed survey is the rise of naturalism in animal art and the analysis following is largely his.

as the eventual triumph of naturalism, we can easily appreciate the decline of the monster motif. Combinations of the very ancient heraldic art of the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians, and the geometrical designs from these regions seemed to be transported and synthesized into their own fiercely heroic ideals by the northern barbarian tribes. They were then amalgamated into the southern art forms to produce the world of Romanesque art--despite the Carolingian attempt at a naturalistic revival. This period, in turn, gave way to the more crowded, naturalistic perceptions of the Gothic era, relegating the even more grotesque grotesques to less central positions in church ornament and manuscript illumination. Similarly, the animals represented became more and more realistic, responding to the revival in the natural sciences, understandably leaving the monsters further and further behind.

The parallel development of the monster, and specifically the dragon, in medieval literature and art at times intertwine. Still, they require individual treatment, and I return to the literary dragon. We note the natural shifting of the dragon motif from symbol to sign level with the scientific awakenings of the early Renaissance years. Prior to this, at the very height of medieval literature, we see the seeds of this development sown in a different manner. Symbols become signs not only through the loss of their substance in the narrative, but through the loss of their

multiple meanings. Two literary genres highly influenced the evolution of the dragon-symbol to dragon-sign: the bestiary examined above with its dogmatic dragon/devil interpretation and the more subtly influential saints' lives.

B. Saints' Lives

With Beowulf, the single example of its kind, we are often at a loss, but with a medieval English saint's life we have abundant similar material and comparisons can be successfully made. Rosemary Woolf tells us that

The hagiographical form was the dominant narrative kind in the Old English period. Not only are the saints' lives more abundant in Old English literature than any other kind of story, but also many other narratives seem to have been influenced by them.⁴

In the strange world of hagiography, where the formulaic dominates, we can follow the evolution of the dragon motif in the transmission of a particular life. An illustration of this is seen in the story of the apostle Matthew, as recorded in the ninth-century Old English Martyrology. While preaching in Ethiopia, Matthew encountered two dragons, "and from the Ethiopians he drove away two sorcerers who worked great magic there with two dragons, and he awoke their king's son from

⁴ Rosemary Woolf, "Saints' Lives," in Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature, ed. E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), p. 64.

death and baptised the king whose name was Eglippus. . . ."⁵

Over four hundred years later, the South English Legendary tells the story, much expanding the customary short entry of the Martyrology, displaying a feature added some time in the transmission of the legend.⁶ Matthew's dragons are now devils spewing brimstone:

Tweie dragons þe deuelen were . to hom hi clupede sone
þat caste brimston al fure . and slou into al þe londe
Men and bestes picke perwip. . . .⁷

In both versions, Matthew's dragons are found in Ethiopia, a locale famous for its marvels in the traditions traced earlier in this study. The legends often spoke of their saints as missionaries to the geographical areas known to most only by the travel accounts, and dragons or large serpents were thought indigenous to these regions.⁸ The

⁵ An Old English Martyrology, re-ed. George Herzfeld, EETS, Vol. 116 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), p. 174.

⁶ Also see Jacobus de Voragine, Legenda Aurea: Vulgo historica Lombardica dicta, ed. Th. Graesse, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1843 and 1850, Breslau 1890; rpt. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1969), p. 623, and the translation in The Golden Legend, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1941), p. 562. This very similar account was probably the model for the South English Legendary's entry.

⁷ The South English Legendary, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 2 vols., EETS, Vols. 235 and 236 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 398.

⁸ See Clinton Albertson, Anglo-Saxon Saints and Heroes (Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 27, n. 71: "Tales of

dragon was also associated with magic and the reference to the sorcerers (in both versions) would be in harmony with the creature's use in potions and alchemy. A western view of near eastern mysticism and idolatry might also be behind this description, with a hint of Daniel and the Dragon. In its evolution, the motif apparently drew from the material available in diverse genres.

The additions to the legend are also revealing. In the Middle English version, the dragons are not just familiars of the eastern sorcerers, they are now ravagers of the countryside, "and slou into al þe londe men and bestes þicke þerwip," an addition possibly influenced by St. Martha's entry in the same work: "A luper dragon þer was wip alle þat slou men wel wide" (p. 349). Further parallels seem to confirm a similar formula. In Martha: "þis womman ȝeode forþ baldeliche · hardi heo was inou þat best he[o] sprengde wip holy water · and þe crois held up anhei. þe best stod stille as a ston · þo he þe crois ysey" (p. 349). In Matthew: "þo sein Mattheu þis ihurde · baldeliche he gan gon þe signe he made of the crois · and to hom wende anon þo the dragons him iseie · to is fet he fel adoun" (p. 398).

Matthew's dragons are becoming more like the dragons common in saints' lives. The Golden Legend mentions over a

the marvels of the East may also have indirectly contributed to the miraculous exaggerations in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, through the medium of the Lives of the saints of the desert."

dozen saints contending with the creature. The majority are of the St. George mould. A dragon, preying on the neighbouring people, must be contained. The saint, usually by a miraculous method (sign of the Cross, holy water), disposes of the creature or subdues it in such a way as to make it harmless. Even the soldier George does not kill the creature on the spot, but has the maiden lead it, tame, back to the village.⁹ The dragons are still recognizable as animals living in the creature's customary habitats (caves, water), but the stories become progressively more parallel in their symbolization.¹⁰

⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, Graesse, pp. 260-61.

¹⁰ In some of the lives of the most well-known dragon-slaying saints, we note these peculiarities of dragons or dragon-like creatures within the usual formula:

Dragons are (1) found in caves: Sylvester, Beatus, Samson; (2) as guardians: Perpetua (ladder to hell), Barlaam (hell-mouth), Matthew (magicians, king), Dominic (hell-mouth), James (tomb), Guthlac (barrow), Jovinus (temple), Philip (statue), Donatus (spring); (3) found in water: Gregory, Martin, Columba, Clemens, Nigasius, Vigor, Donatus; (4) in visions: Margaret, Perpetua, Dominic; (5) general harm to men (not in above lists): George, Martha, Romanus, Admandus.

The different methods of disposing of the creature are (1) the sign of the cross: Martha, Matthew, Julian, Nigasius; (2) prayer: Matthew, Martin, Samson, Beatus; (3) spitting: Donatus; (4) wrapping a girdle around: Nigasius, George, Martha; (5) actual combat: Romanus, Michael; (6) crucifix: James, Martha; (7) strike with whip: Donatus; (8) sealing the dragon in a hole or cave: Sylvester, Samson; (9) telling the dragon to leave: Philip, Matthew, Martin, Jovinus, Amandus; (10) holy water: Martha.

These are only a sample of the dragon stories associated with saints. See the *Acta Sanctorum*, 1615-1915, Hippolyte Delehaye, from the original French (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922). Particularly interesting passages can be found under Romanus 59:74-103; George 12:101-65; Matthew 46:194-227.

Besides this attempt to align Matthew's dragon story with the more typical saint and dragon encounters, embellishment in the fourteenth-century version reveals an interpretation of dragons no longer questionable or even implied. They are devils. We have moved from the animal level of the Old English version (with possible symbolic undertones if the treatment were longer and more developed) to a version representing the advanced evolution of the motif now almost into a sign, a sign for devils. Although the Middle English "deuelen" may have a meaning less limited than our modern English "devils," the word clearly suggests Christian colouring.

The dragon as the sign of the devil or a demon is especially fitting in saints' lives. The equation was made in the Bible itself, adapting the creature to Christian mythology, and was reinforced by the exegetes. The saint's life exemplified the holy person as hero triumphing over the dragon, monster or other humans in specialized contests.¹¹ The dragon's role in a saint's life is straightforward. In earlier versions, the creature can be taken to be an animal symbolizing consummate animal power, perhaps, but as the centuries progressed, the motif, more often than not, became a blatant sign of the devil or a demon, as the genre demanded.

¹¹ Albertson, p. 23.

The South English Legendary version of the Matthew legend is not isolated in its interpretation. The sorcerers were associated with heathen gods and practices. As Woolf maintained, the basic supposition in saints' lives is that pagan deities (and the magicians' dragons were apparently in the same category) were demons.¹² In a rhymed Middle English version, the sorcerers are directly addressed by the saint as devils when he challenges them to raise up the dragons which he had subdued:

"Whare es zowre craft, ze deuils? I sai,
 Raise vp zowre menze, if ze may!"
 þan þir deuils did þaire payne
 þaire dragons forto rais ogayne;
 Bot all þaire might moght none auaille:
 Nowþer stird þai top ne taile.¹³

The formula became so popular, and was added to so many saints' lives (perhaps in some instances with little thought), that we find Matthew's life acquiring a second dragon story: King Phulbanus ordered twelve gold and silver idols and St. Matthew to be placed on a burning pyre. The flames did not touch the saint. A flaming dragon, however, appeared, prohibiting the escape of the king who, in fear, appealed to Matthew. Praying, the saint causes the dragon to vanish.¹⁴

¹² Woolf, p. 41.

¹³ Ed. in C. Horstmann, Altenglische Legenden, Neue Folge, I (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1881), 133, ll. 113-18.

¹⁴ Acta Sanctorum, 46:196.

This story bears some resemblance to another dragon mentioned in the Martyrology. In the June 2 entry of St. Erasmus, bishop of Antioch:

The emperor Maximianus then ordered him [Erasmus] to be led to his idol, that he might sacrifice to it. There stood a golden image 12 cubits high, and a big dragon came forth from it and devoured one third of the heathen people in the presence of the bishop.¹⁵

Erasmus is put in prison and no more is written of the dragon. This saint (associated with Elmo of the St. Elmo's fire legend) does not have a strong tradition as dragon-slayer in English lives, but his story, similar in tone to Matthew's heathen dragons, is a fitting example of the dragon motif in an early saint's life.

Although this time the dragon is a positive Christian force and interesting in that light, the story, like Matthew's, uses the motif to pit the pagan and Christian powers against each other. We find the clearest example of this in Exodus 7:12-15 where Aaron's rod, transformed into a serpent (draco), devours the dracones of the Egyptian sorcerers.

These rather obscure dragon stories are not the only ones which appealed to the Anglo-Saxons. Three Old English

¹⁵ "pa het Maximianus se casere hine lædan to his deo-
folgelde, þæt he þam gulde. þa stod þær gyldenn onlicnes
twelf elna heah, ond of þære com gan micel draca ond abat
þone priddan dæl þæs hæðnan folces beforan þam biscope"
(Old English Martyrology, p. 90). Cf. Jacobus de Voragine's
treatment, Graesse, p. 802.

prose versions of the life of St. Margaret are extant.¹⁶

The devil appeared to Margaret in the guise of a dragon (presumably the red dragon of the Apocalypse) while she was imprisoned:

and suddenly it happened that a grisly devil appeared; his name was Ruffus. He was exceedingly large, in the shape of a dragon and spotted like a snake. A light came from his teeth, like that of a white sword and from his eyes a flame like that of fire and from his nose a great amount of smoke and fire and his tongue coiled around his neck.¹⁷

Here no doubt exists about the use of the motif. This popular saint, often represented in later iconography with a dragon, as many saints were,¹⁸ encouraged the dragon=devil

¹⁶ One in Ms. B.M., Cotton Tiberius A III, fol. 71b, ed. T. Osvaldus Cockayne, *Narratiunculæ anglice conscriptæ* (London: John R. Smith, 1861); another in Ms. C.C.C.C. 303, Sl7, fol. 99-107, ed. Bruno Assman, in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben* (Kassel: Wigand, 1889); the third in Ms. B.M., Cotton Otho B 10, which was almost entirely burned.

¹⁷ "And hit þa færunge gewearð sona æfter þam, þæt þær inn eode an grislic deofol; his nama wæs Ruffus. And he wæs swiðe mycel on dracan heowe and eall he wæs nædderfah. And of his toþan leome ofstod, eal swa of hwiten swurde, and of his eagan swilces fyres lyg and of his nasþyrlum smec and fyr ormæte mycel and his tunge þreowe his sweore belygde" (Assman, p. 175).

¹⁸ For a short list of popular saints with the dragon as their emblem, consult Maurice and Wilfred Drake, *Saints and Their Emblems* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1916; rpt. Detroit: Gale, 1971), pp. 172-73. A much more complete listing with references is found in *Caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire*, by Ch. Cahier, Tome Premier (Paris: 1867; rpt. Bruxelles, 1966), pp. 314-22, where he outlines the stories of no less than seventy saints who are

interpretation just as Michael the Archangel battling the dragon/devil must have reinforced this particular meaning of the motif. The dragon in saints' legends which probably originated in myth or folklore, such as those of St. Martha or St. George, would lean towards this sign level both because the genre needed a character in opposition to the saintly figure and because some saints' legends, like Michael's and Margaret's, made the identification of dragon with devil so common.

Margaret's combat with the dragon is recorded in the Golden Legend,¹⁹ and again in the South English Legendary: "Me telp þat þe deuel com . to þis maide swie / In þe forme of a dragon."²⁰ In a manuscript dated in the early fourteenth century, we find the same story of the virginal Margaret, who allows herself to be imprisoned rather than succumb to the carnal desires of the lord of Antioch:

Maiden Mergrete þo loked her beside:
And seiþe a loplích dragoun out of an hirn glide;
His eiþen wer ful griseliche, his mouþe ȝened wide
And Mergrete miȝt nowhar fle, þer sche most abide.

associated with the dragon. Incredibly, even this list is incomplete.

¹⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, Graesse, p. 401.

²⁰ South English Legendary, p. 297.

Maiden Mergrete stod stille so ani ston
 And þat lōpliche worm to hir-ward gan gon,
 He toke hir in his foule moupe, and swalled her,
 flesche and bon.
 Anon he to-brast--damage no hadde sche non.²¹

Margaret was often pictured emerging from a dragon's body unharmed. Iconographically similar to Jonah and the whale, the combat can also be compared to illustrations of Jason and the dragon.²² Yet Jacobus de Voragine maintains in his entry that all agree that this aspect of the story is apocryphal. Lydgate, however, repeats the event:

Where as she lay bounden in prisoun,
 In the lykenesse of a fell dragoun
 The olde serpent, whiche called is Sathan,
 And hastily to assaile her he began;

With open mouthe, the virgyne to devour,
 First of alle, he swolwed in hir hede,
 And she devoutly, herself to socoure,
 Gan crosse herself, in her mortal drede;
 And by grace, anoone or she toke hede,
 The horrible beste, in relees of hir peyne,
 Brast assondre, and partyd was on tweyne.²³

²¹ Ed. in Altenglische Legenden, II, 230-31.

²² An Attic vase shows Jason being disgorged by a huge serpent; see Allen, p. 32, who quotes Jeremiah 51:34, "Nebuchadnezzar 'hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out.'" For a typical Ms. illustration of Margaret and the dragon, see Allen, p. 55.

²³ From Ms. Durham Cosin V. II. 14, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, in The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, EETS, Vol. 109 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1911), pp. 183-84.

The life of another popular saint had an effect on the motif similar to that of Margaret's Life. The combat between Michael and the dragon, merely embellishments of the Apocalyptic story, served to limit the dragon's possible meanings, as did Margaret's legend. In the Early South English Legendary (1280-1300), we find mention of his fight:

Men synguez a-Mizheles-masse-day: In holie church also
Of one bataille pat seint Mizhel with a dragon scholde do:
Pat was þe lufere lucifer. . . .²⁴

And yet the dragons of Margaret and Michael are not representative of dragons in later saints' lives. The traditional legend of Martha has a relatively sustained narrative about a dragon. The South English Legendary tells the story,²⁵ and William Caxton includes it in his translation of the Golden Legend. This dragon had a detailed description, a heritage and name:

a great dragon, half beast and half fish, greater than an ox, longer than a horse . . . which dragon lay hiding and lurking in the river, and perished them that passed by and drowned ships. He came thither by sea from Galicia, and was engendered of Leviathan, which is a serpent of the water and is much wood, and of a beast called Bonacho, that is engendered in Galicia. . . . The dragon was called of them that dwelled in the country Tarasconus, in remembrance of him that place is

²⁴ Ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS, Vol. 87 (London: Trübner, 1887), p. 304. The South English Legendary version is almost identical at this section, p. 407.

²⁵ South English Legendary, pp. 348ff.

called Tarasconus, which tofore was called Berlue, and the Black Lake because there be woods shadowous and black.²⁶

The reference to the Leviathan shows the dragon to be a creature appropriate for destruction by a Christian saint, and yet Martha's story has details which indicate that the dragon was a more substantial character than those in saints' lives modeled after George's dragon or the Tarascon. The Bonacho is probably the bonasus of encyclopedias and bestiaries.²⁷ The attention to locale suggests a folklore source. With such handling, the dragon does not become entirely subsumed into the theological statement of good over evil. The animal level is still operative.

The same can be said for the St. George legend. Its dragon combat, a twelfth-century addition, is based on the Perseus and Andromeda myth.²⁸ Although obviously signifying the saint's triumph over evil, or the devil, the story is rich enough in its own right to echo the old theme of the

²⁶ The Golden Legend, trans. William Caxton, ed. George V. O'Neill (Cambridge: University Press, 1914), pp. 34-35. The Latin is in Jacobus de Voragine, Graesse, p. 444.

²⁷ An ox-like creature: see Pliny, viii, 40; Solinus, 168:5; Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor (De bestiis), P.L. 177:84; Thomas de Cantimpré, 4:11.

²⁸ See Fontenrose, pp. 515-20. Many lengthy treatments of this legend and its mysteries are available. The South English Legendary, perhaps following Ælfric's lead, instead of Jacobus de Voragine's, does not mention the dragon episode.

hero's conquest over the greatest animal power. This theme is intermingled in the Bible with the dragon=devil one and, in the better saints' lives, prohibits the total conversion of the motif from symbol to sign.

Other interesting exceptions to the rule exist. In the legend of St. James the Greater, a "fuyr Drake" fiercely blocks with flames the path of the disciples of the martyred saint in their mission to bury their master. Holding a cross before it, the men cause the dragon to burst apart.²⁹ A wicked queen is involved and many miracles occur, but the dragon seems to be just one more natural obstacle overcome, this time not by the saint himself, but by his disciples.

Elfric tells that St. Martin of Tours possessed the power to control water serpents (næddre, yfela wurm) as he demonstrated to his companions, saying "Water serpents hear me, but men will not hear me."³⁰ This wurm (later worm, grislich addre)³¹ never seemed to achieve the full status of dragon and thus the legend did not become part of the dragon tradition in saints' lives.

²⁹ Early South English Legendary, p. 39. Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, Graesse, p. 425.

³⁰ Elfric's Lives of Saints, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS, 2 vols., o.s. 94 and 114 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1890, 1900; rpt. 1966), II, 296.

³¹ Early South English Legendary, p. 452; South English Legendary, p. 487. A life of Martin edited in the Altenglische Legenden, Horstmann, p. 152, does not mention the episode at all.

Of those saints' lives that fall outside the standard pattern (i.e., a brief episode about an incident in the saint's life when a dragon by a cave, river, well, or fire was quelled by the very holiness of the saint), a number of legends remain with characteristics sufficiently similar that we might productively consider them together. In these lives we find the dragon appearing in a dream or vision or interpreted within the narrative as an omen. The motif in these instances has evolved one step further and is even more truly a sign. Jacobus de Voragine provides three fine examples of the use of the dragon in saints' lives.

St. Dominic, while he was in Spain with his followers, had a vision in which a monstrous dragon was trying to swallow his companions. Soon after, many of these men left the company of the saint, but Dominic, realizing the import of the vision, prayed until his followers safely returned to him.³² Similarly, St. Perpetua saw a vision of a high golden ladder leading to heaven. Fixed knives and staves prevented one from leaning to the right or left and at the bottom lay a huge and hideous dragon. Satyrus, one who was imprisoned with her for refusing to worship false idols, beckoned to her and the others imprisoned to follow him up the ladder and not to fear the dragon. Thus, they all knew from the

³² Jacobus de Voragine, *Graesse*, p. 475.

vision that they were called to martyrdom.³³ Before St. Gregory unwillingly was consecrated pope, a sequence of events occurred which began with the flooding of the Tiber. When the flood subsided, the bodies of a number of serpents, monsters and a great dragon remained, poisoning the air and producing a plague whose first victim was Pope Pelagius. After trying to escape the city, Gregory was found and consecrated.³⁴

The dragon motif in these lives can be more clearly interpreted than in those in which the creature is a solid character in the narrative. Here the dragon signifies something specific and readily understandable. St. Dominic's dragon; without doubt, is the devil or hell-mouth about to consume the spiritual goodness of the saint's followers. St. Perpetua's dragon at the bottom of the ladder is once again the devil or hell-mouth with characteristics echoing the past uses of the motif. We find the dragon as guardian of something useless to itself (tree, gold, now heaven) a natural and fitting occupation after immersing ourselves in the medieval monster tradition. The dragon-as-sign loosely recalling disparate myths and stories becomes strong in its Christian role.

33
Ibid., p. 798.

34
Ibid., p. 190.

St. Gregory's dragon is an omen, a sign in more than the literary sense, of the wrongness of Gregory's reluctance to assume spiritual leadership. The creature participates slightly in the narrative--it helps bring on the plague--and thus is less artificially contrived than the visions, but its role is basically the same. Although a hint of its animal nature is present, it is, nevertheless, a literary device in this version and is predominantly a sign.

Generally speaking, the dragon in saints' lives develops into a sign for evil or the devil, but instances show us that its old power over the imagination of the people was not totally Christian nor did its animal power completely desert the motif. St. Gregory's dragon at one time may have had an accompanying ritual like the one recorded in the entry for the feast of St. John:

There are some who gather the bones of dead animals on this day and burn them. This is for two reasons, as we are told by Master John Beleth. First, because this is in keeping with an ancient custom. For there are animals which are called dragons; they fly in the air, and swim in the water, and crawl upon the earth. When they flew through the air they became impassioned and dropped their seed into wells and the coursing waters, which brought about a year of plague. To combat this, it was found helpful to build a great fire of animal bones, the smoke of which drove off the dragons. And because this was done at the time of the feast of St. John, there are many who still keep this custom. The other reason is that in so doing, the burning of the bones of St. John by the heretics is commemorated.³⁵

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 363-64. This translation is from Ryan and Ripperger, pp. 326-27.

The extent of survival of pagan customs in saints' lives is a topic not wholly agreed upon by critics,³⁶ yet examples such as the one above, where a custom is admittedly ancient, demonstrate an unavoidable intermingling of traditions. Thus, a motif which was used freely in non-Christian contexts will retain many of the characteristics developed in secular traditions. Not surprisingly, then, dragons opposing saints will inhabit caves, spew fire and fly, showing themselves to be influenced not only by the Scriptures and patristic writings but also by the travel account, encyclopedia, bestiary and mythological conception of the creature.

The interpretive level of a motif must be judged independently for each occurrence in fictive literature. The writer may wish to develop or suppress meaning depending upon his particular aim. Generally speaking, however, we can see in the English saints' lives, beginning with the Old English

³⁶ A rather conservative view of the effect of pagan civilization on saints' lives is found in Hippolyte Delehaye's The Legends of Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography, trans. V. M. Crawford (London: Longmans, Green, 1907; rpt. South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), pp. 148-213. More credit is given to the folk element in Gordon Hall Gerould, Saints' Legends (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), pp. 24ff. See also another Bollandist's position on the many dragon stories he records where the combat of Michael and the dragon is cited as the representation of something incorporeal: "est certe ista pugna invisibilis visibili figura expressa. Atque hinc ortam censeo traditionem popularem, quae metaphoram ad veritatem traduxit" (Acta Sanctorum, 59:88).

lives and continuing through the centuries, an inevitable evolution of the dragon motif due to the demands of the genre itself. The dragon becomes an effective adversary, at times natural, but progressively more supernatural as the motif is used over and over again. Very probably later writers or oral traditions appended a dragon combat to a saint's life because the combat was by that time a dependable sign of spiritual prowess.

C. Romances

Another classification of medieval English literature which repeatedly concerns itself with dragons is the complex body of material known as romance literature. The goal of these vernacular stories is often more elusive than that of saints' lives and determination of possible symbolic meanings can become more difficult than when dealing with the generally single-minded message of the average saint's life. Although the English romance emerged as a popular genre relatively late (twelfth century), its fundamental character and tone, emphasizing the heroic and adventurous, allowed and invited use of the dragon motif on all three interpretive levels. Nevertheless, one once again discerns the inevitable degeneration of the motif from symbol to sign in later romances. As might be expected, the dragon-as-sign in romance is more secularly oriented than in the saints' lives. The

persistent dragon/devil equation of the saints' lives might have artificially hurried the process, but the romances confirm that the evolution of the motif is a natural language phenomenon.

The most logical starting point in the labyrinth of material is the literature directly concerned with Arthur.³⁷ Historians have traced Arthurian lore only as far back as the ninth century, which is curious, for the pseudo-historical king was probably sixth century.³⁸ For our aims, examination of the usual path of transmission from Nennius, Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon to the Alliterative Morte Arthure and Malory will suffice.

Arthur is not remembered for any grand dragon combat; nevertheless, dragons do figure in his legend, interwoven into the narrative in a manner characteristic of the genre. The first dragon reference in all these accounts originated in Nennius, Historia Britonum. Vortigern (here Guorthigirnus) could not complete construction of his tower. The stones laid during the day fell down again at night. He seeks help from Merlin who tells him to dig under the tower where he will find the cause of his difficulty. Merlin tells where to

³⁷ An invaluable reference is Roger Sherman Loomis, ed., Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

³⁸ For the Welsh sources of the legend, see "The Arthur of History," Kenneth H. Jackson, in Loomis, pp. 12-19.

dig and two vermes, one white, the other red, are found asleep in a pool under the tower. They begin to try to drive each other out of the pool and the white one wins. Merlin interprets that this sign foretells that the red vermis signifies the red dragon of the people of Britain who will be overrun by the white vermis (dragon) which represents the Saxons.³⁹

From this simple episode Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1136) constructs a highly portentous scenario in his Historia regum Britanniae, resulting in an astounding number of omens, some enigmatic, some promptly clarified, called the Prophetia Merlini.⁴⁰ Using the ominous white dragon as a springboard, Merlin launches into an animal allegory punctuated often by dragons:

The German Worm will trample religion again. The red dragon will gain strength. . . . The German Worm will take the crown. The seeds of the white dragon are decimated. Two more dragons (one killed by envy, the other under cover of authority) Boar, Ram, Ass,

³⁹ "duo vermes duo dracones sunt; vermis rufus draco tuus est, et stagnum figura hujus mundi est." At ille albus draco, illius gentis quae occupavit gentes et regiones plurimas in Brittannia . . ." (Nennius, Historia Britonum, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London: Sumptibus Societatis, 1838), chaps. 40-42, p. 33).

⁴⁰ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia regum Britanniae, Latin ed., ed. Acton Griscom, trans. from Welsh Ms. Robert Ellis Jones (London: Longmans; Green, 1929), vi, 17 - vii, 3.

Girl, Hedgehog, Heron, Fox . . . Dragon of Worcester
 against the Giant of Wickedness . . . dragons with
 wings fight those without . . .⁴¹

and much more.

Wace in his Roman de Brut (1155) and Layamon's Middle English Brut (after 1204) both retain the story although in Wace Merlin prophesies that the dragons (no longer worms) are kings to come and no more.⁴² Layamon embellishes the story and describes the dragons as fire breathing. Merlin's prophecy is only of Uther and Aurelius and Arthur.⁴³

This history of Arthur's family is omitted in the later English version. The Alliterative Morte Arthure (1360) begins with the messenger from the Roman Emperor Lucius addressing Arthur, well after the accounts of Wace and Layamon who were more concerned with Britain's story, not just its famous king's. Malory's narratives (1469-70) likewise begin after Vortigern's time with the fabulous events

⁴¹ Ibid., vii, 3 - viii, 1.

⁴² Arthurian Chronicles Represented by Wace and Layamon, ed. and trans. Ernest Rhys (London: J. M. Dent, 1928), p. 16.

⁴³ "þa comen ut þas tweie draken:
 & muchel dunen makeden.
 fuhten grimliche:
 dun i pere dich.
 ne ifah nauere na cniht:
 nan ladluker fiht.
 fluzen of heore muðe:
 fures leome"

(Layamon's Brut or Chronicle of Britain, ed. Frederick Madden (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1847), II, 244-45).

surrounding the conception of Arthur.

Geoffrey's second dragon occurrence is the vision of Uther, Arthur's father. At the time of the poisoning of his brother, Aurelius, Uther sees in the sky a star of great magnitude projecting a beam of light. At the end of the beam is a ball of fire spread out in the form of a dragon. Two rays of light emerge from the dragon's mouth: one directed toward Gaul and the other toward the Irish Sea. This latter ray shatters into seven small lights. Merlin, again interpreting, informs Uther that Aurelius is dead and the dragon signifies Uther, the beam toward Gaul indicates Arthur, the beam shining toward the Irish Sea Anna whose sons and grandsons will one day rule Britain. In memory of this vision Uther has two golden dragons made--one as a gift to Winchester and one to carry to war, hence he was known as Uther Pendragon (dragon-head).⁴⁴ Wace and Layamon repeat the story, little altered.⁴⁵

Besides being another clear example of a literary sign, this passage shows a connection, probably erroneous, between the dragon as a military sign and Welsh legends. The word

⁴⁴ Geoffrey, viii, 14-17.

⁴⁵ Wace, pp. 31-32;
 "Com of þan steore,
 a leome swiðe sturne
 at þeos leome ende:
 wes a drake hende
 of þes draken muðe
 leomen come inohze" (Layamon, II, 325).

"pendragon" (Welsh for "chieftain") and this faulty etymology also indicate the ready acceptance of the term or image as representative of something else.⁴⁶ This dragon bears little resemblance to the one in Beowulf. We are hardly conscious of the animal aspect, only its portentous quality.

Uther's dream is somewhat paralleled by the next dragon mentioned by Geoffrey. Arthur himself dreams, this time of a bear flying through the air; the ground trembled when it growled. From the west a dragon appears, flying with the light of its eyes illuminating the earth. The dragon burns the bear and hurls its scorched body to the ground. Others read the dream as portending Arthur's (the dragon's) conquest over a giant (the bear), but Arthur interpreted it as his victory over the Roman emperor Lucius.⁴⁷ Shortly after the episode Arthur does indeed slay a giant.

Arthur's dream is Geoffrey's last dragon source for Malory. Apparently a popular event in the king's legend,

⁴⁶ Geriadur Prifysgol Cymru (University of Wales Dictionary) (Caerdydd (Cardiff): University of Wales Press, 1950--), lists the first definition of "dragon" as warrior, warleader, hero, chieftain, prince or military power. It cites the twelfth-thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen's "wynragon" (51:4) (dragwn wyn) which usually denotes Saxons and red dragon denotes the Welsh. Similarly, the Irish draic is used figuratively of a warrior or hero.

⁴⁷ Geoffrey, x, 2; Wace, p. 80; in Layamon, III, 15, the interpretation is abbreviated. No giant or Roman emperor is mentioned. A line is missing from Ms. Cotton Calig. A ix.

the dream appears in the Alliterative Morte Arthure:

Him dredmed of a dragon, dredful to behold,
 Come drivand over the deep to drenchen his pople
 Even walkand out the west lands
 Wandrand unworthyly over the wale ythes
 Both his hed and his hals were holly all over
 Ounded of azure, enamelled full fair;
 His shoulders were shaled all in clene silver
 Shredde over all the shrimp with shrinkand pointes;
 His womb and his winges of wonderful hewes
 In marvelous mailles he mounted full high.
 His tail was totattered, with tonges full huge;
 Whom that he touched he was tint forever.
 His feet were flourished all in fine sable
 And his clawes were enclosed with clene gold;
 And such a venomous flaire flow from his lippes,
 The flood of the flawes all on fire seemed!⁴⁸

We cannot help noticing, especially in this passage, that the dragons associated with the legend of Arthur in these sources are not real beasts but the characters of dreams, visions and omens. The Alliterative Morte Arthure describes a shimmering exquisite creature. Care is taken to retain its dangerous properties and the combat with the bear is an exciting scene, full of detail. Yet we must remember that the dragon signifies Arthur himself--glorious, yet dangerous, beautiful, yet "drivand over the deep to drenchen [drown] his pople." The vision's message is complex and the dragon is aptly used.

⁴⁸ King Arthur's Death: Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure, ed. Larry D. Benson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), ll. 760-74. Cf. Arthur's dream of dragons before battle with Mordred in the Stanzaic Morte Arthure, ll. 3181ff.

A dream scenario does not mean the writers thought the creature unreal. Their stories abound in magical elements: giants, elves, enchanted pool, immortality.⁴⁹ We know, too, that stories did circulate about Arthur battling dragons.⁵⁰ Malory's sources, however, used the motif quite effectively as sign. Geoffrey's Prophetia Merlini is a vivid example. The dragon was a prominent beast in prophetic writings. Note also that the creature is always used to represent people or nations in a political situation, which is understandable considering the overall theme of these works, just as the dragon represented spiritual opponents in saints' lives.

Significant also is the lack of negative connotations inherent in the dragon-as-sign in these instances. A red dragon (cf. the Apocalyptic dragon, the beast in St. Margaret's Life) under Vortigern's tower represents the people of Britain. Uther is represented by the creature in his dream, as is Arthur in his. The creature now seems to be the

⁴⁹ See Geoffrey: Giant's Ring, viii, 10; Pool of Lin Ligua, ix, 7; Giant, x, 3; and Layamon: Elves, II, 385; Avalon, III, 144; Nickers in Loch Lomond, II, 489.

⁵⁰ See R. S. Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis, Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 31. Arthur in a legend of St. Efflam (Legendary of Tréguier, c. 1400) is unable to dispose of a dragon which the saint dismisses through prayer. See also the reproductions in the back of the book (nos. 349 and 387) for two very different (Flemish and English) illustrations of the White and Red Dragon scene.

all powerful figure with none of the demon-devil associations so prevalent in the saints' lives."

But Malory's stories draw on more than the early pseudo-historical writings. Vinaver wrote that he gave "new life to dying traditions,"⁵¹ and his use of the dragon motif demonstrates this. Malory's dragons were placed in portentous positions in the narrative, as I demonstrate below. Although not all strictly signs, the dragons never quite lost this aspect. Malory wrote in the second half of the fifteenth century. Hundreds of years of literary and artistic interest in dragons and other monsters preceded his tales. The evolution of the motif from symbol to sign continued strongly in saints' lives, and romances were not immune to this evolution. Although never quite as single-minded, nor limited, in their use of the motif, the romances did show certain negative connotations.

Malory first uses monstrous imagery in the dream Arthur has after inadvertently sleeping with his sister. This union produces Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son and his eventual bane. Arthur dreams of "gryffens and serpentes" which came into his land burning and killing. They did Arthur great harm and wounded him but at last he conquered them.⁵² No

⁵¹ Eugène Vinaver, "Sir Thomas Malory," in Loomis, *Arthurian Literature*, p. 550.

⁵² *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947, 1967; rpt. Oxford University Press, 1971, 1977), I, 19.

interpretation follows, but clearly the griffins and serpents are Mordred. This is confirmed the next day by Merlin, who prohibits Arthur from following the questing beast (introduced at this point). The ubiquitous sorcerer tells Arthur of his parentage and the son who will destroy him and all his knights. Later Malory repeats the elaborate description of the dragon in Arthur's dream which we saw in the Alliterative Morte Arthure. The philosopher tells him that:

the dragon thou dremyste of betokyns thyne owne
 persone that thus here sayles with thy syker knyghtes;
 and the coloure of his wyngys is thy kingdomes that
 thou haste with thy knyghtes wonne. And his tayle
 that was all to-tatered sygnifyed your noble knyghtes
 of the Rounde Table. And the beare that the dragon
 slowe above in the clowdis betokyns som tyraunte that
 turmentis thy peple, other thou art lyke to fight
 with som gyant boldely in batayle be thyself alone.
 Therefore of this dredfull dreame drede thee but a
 lytyll, and care nat now, sir conquerroure, but com-
 fort[h] thyself. (V, 4)

Note that the dragon (Arthur here) is scorching all the land. The philosopher's interpretation of Arthur and the giant is logical since the giant episode follows.

What of the knights valiantly destroying dragons and saving maidens? Malory shows us three knights involved with the creature, but the treatment is not quite what we might expect. Lancelot's encounter with the dragon is short.⁵³ The situation in the narrative at this point is as follows:

⁵³ See Malory, xi, 1, and above, Chapter IV, p. 220.

A hermit comes to the Round Table and tells Arthur that the knight who will win the "Sankgreall" will be conceived that year. We are then immediately involved in Lancelot's rescue of Elaine from the scalding water. Almost incidentally, Lancelot is asked to perform the additional service of delivering the same people from a "orryble and fyendely dragon spyttyng wyldre fyre oute of hys mowthe" (Bk. XI, 1). He sees written on the dragon's tomb, "Here shall com a lybarde of kynges blood and he shall sle this serpente. And this lybarde shall engendir a lyon in this forayne contrey whyche lyon shall passe all other knightes."

Lancelot slays the dragon, sees the Grail for the first time and unwittingly sleeps with Elaine (thinking she is Guenevere). She later gives birth to Galahad, "which lyon shall passe all other knightes" and win the Holy Grail, fulfilling the hermit's prophecy. If we look at Malory's narratives as having two dominant themes, the life and death of Arthur and the quest for the Grail, we see an interesting parallel in the prophecies portending the culmination of both themes. Arthur's dream of griffins and serpents is a result of his unwitting conception of the man ultimately responsible for his death--Mordred. Lancelot's seemingly needless encounter with a dragon (serpente) heralds his (also unwitting) conception of Galahad, the man who is ultimately responsible for the culmination of the Grail theme.

The dragon seems to be the most effective vehicle for

portents. Perhaps it is simply that animal imagery was felt necessary at these points. Sir Bors, soon after this Lancelot episode, submits himself to many adventures in the appropriately named Castell Adventures. He defeats Sir Bedyvere, strikes a head off a lion and then sees a dragon in the courtyard:

he sawe a dragon in the courte, passynge parelous and orryble, and there semyd to him that there were lettyrs off golde wryttyn in hys forhede, and sir Bors thought that the lettyrs made a sygnyfycacion of 'kyng Arthure'. And right so there came an orryble lybarde and an olde, and there they fought longe and ded grete batayle togydys. And at the laste the dragon spyte oute of hys mowthe as hit had bene an hondred dragons; and lyghtly all the smale dragons slew the olde dragon and tore hym all to pecys. (XI, 5)

Sir Bors' adventures reveal his spiritual strength, and the animal imagery powerfully reinforces this. It seems that Arthur's own knights are his destruction. The "lybarde" could be Lancelot again or Mordred. The episode addresses both themes: Arthur's death and the spiritual quest.

Sir Percival, actively pursuing the Grail, has his own adventure with a dragon, and in this tale we find the motif used in a very Christian sense. Percival comes upon a lion and serpent fighting;

the lyon had overtake the serpente and began batayle with hym. And than sir Percivale thought to helpe the lyon, for he was the more naturall beste of the two, and therewith he drew hys swerde and sette hys shylde afore hym, and there he gaff the serpent suche a buffett that he had a dedely wounde. (XIV, 6)

Percival then dreams of two women, one astride a lion, one astride a serpent, who come to see him. The one on the lion tells him that tomorrow he will fight with the greatest lord of the world; the one on the serpent insists that in return for killing her serpent he must be her man. Later a mysterious priest interprets: The woman on the lion is the new law of the Holy Church; the other is the old law and the serpent is a "fynde" and "devil." The serpent has specific connotations showing that Malory was not immune to this popular interpretation of the dragon.⁵⁴

These three episodes with Lancelot, Bors and Percival indicate that the dragon still can be used on a symbolic level. The dragons in these passages supposedly existed and were not merely a foreshadowing device. Nevertheless, the portentous element strips the creature of its solidity and we are aware that we will miss something if we read only on the story level.

True to form, Arthur dreams before his final battle with Mordred of serpents and worms and beasts in a well:

And the kynge thought there was undir hym, farre
from hym, an hydeous depe blak watir, and therein
was all maner of serpentis and wormes and wylde bestis
fowle and orryble. And suddeynly the kynge thought

⁵⁴ This "serpent" iconographically is a winged dragon. See Loomis, *Arthurian Legends*, no. 283 for combat, no. 328 for vision of the New and Old Law.

that the whyle turned up-so-downe, and he felle
amonge the serpentes, and every beste toke hym by
a lymme. (XXI, 3)

During the conference before the battle, a snake appears and one knight draws his sword and inadvertently starts the doleful conflict. This dream is quite similar to the griffin and serpent dream at Mordred's conception, revealing once again that the dragon motif in Malory's fifteenth-century writings was used predominantly as a sign.

Earlier romances illustrate more flexible treatment of the motif. One such legend is that of Tristan, which was an "elaborate, fully developed narrative" in France before 1160.⁵⁵ The best account in English, the lengthy Book of Tristan de Lyons of Malory, omits the dragon episode as do all but one of the manuscripts of the Prose Tristan (1225-1300). The scene in the Prose version is an interpolation needed for the recognition scene between Tristan and Isolt.⁵⁶ Beroul, Thomas of Britain,⁵⁷ and Eilhart von Overge

⁵⁵ Helaine Newstead, "The Origin and Growth of the Tristan Legend," in Loomis, Arthurian Literature, p. 122.

⁵⁶ Gertrude Schoepperle, Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance, 2nd ed., expanded by R. S. Loomis (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁷ Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas, ed. Joseph Bédier (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1902), I, 114ff.

all relate the same story and although the episode has no powerful voice in strictly English literature, the dragon story is one which typified this kind of episode in romance and influenced later English tales. The story is that Tristan, on a mission to win Isolt for King Mark, reaches Ireland and hears about a dragon ravaging the country. In order to win favour with the king (he is unaware that Isolt is the reward promised the dragon-slayer), he pursues the beast and heroically slays it. Smitten with its poison, after cutting out its tongue, he wanders off and collapses deathly ill in the forest. Isolt finds him, nurses him and Tristan eventually produces the tongue to keep the false seneschal who claimed to have killed the creature from winning Isolt. Instead, Tristan wins the lady for Mark and on the return trip they take the love potion which begins their tragedy.

This story is recognized as part of a world-wide folktale, the elements of maiden as prize, false claimant, cutting off a piece of the creature as proof occurring throughout folklore.⁵⁸ The legend was very popular in art as the many variant illustrations show.⁵⁹ We are reminded of Ludovico

⁵⁸ See Sigmund Eisner, The Tristan Legend (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 125, who compares it to Theseus slaying the Minotaur. Cf. also the Celtic tale, the Gray Lad, above, p. 221.

⁵⁹ Loomis, Arthurian Legends, nos. 53, 66, 76, 83, 84, 86, 363.

Ariosto's very obvious borrowing of the classical Perseus and Andromeda myth for his adventure of Rogero and Angelica in Orlando Furioso (1516-32).⁶⁰ This Renaissance use of medieval romance and classical themes is instructive. Tristan's encounter with the dragon, like Rogero's battle with Orke, the sea monster, is pure adventure. It elucidates the hero's character and advances the plot, but seems to have no hidden meanings. The dragon is an animal, and nothing more.

The same is true for the relatively well-developed episode involving Pfetan, the dragon in the German Wigalois (thirteenth century). In a story also reminiscent of many folktales and sagas, we see another dragon as opponent to a romance hero. Wigalois, the Knight of Fortune's Wheel, is told by a ghost that he will win a maiden and the land of Korntin if he defeats the gruesome dragon Pfetan who has been killing off the people of the area for ten years. After a rather prolonged and detailed description of the creature and combat, Wigalois slays Pfetan and lies nearly dead him-

⁶⁰ Lucovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. John Harington (1591), ed. Robert McNulty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). See 8:45-58 for Isle of Ebuda episode where Angelica is bound to a rock as an offering to Orke. The rescue is 10:94. Another monster adaptation is the "griffeth horse" or hippogriff (akin to Pegasus in the story), 4:13, 4:33-35, 10:94, 22:22. Also note the journey to the kingdom of Prester John 33:111 and the harpies found there 38:28.

self until a Countess nurses him back to health.⁶¹

The tale of Wigalois reflects the enchanted world of Celtic mythology and although scholars have stressed Wirnt von Grafenberg's dependence upon Christian myth (specifically the Apocalypse dragon),⁶² I think this episode is operating fundamentally on a non-symbolic level. The folklore and adventure element is too strong. The Christian interpolations (Wigalois calls the dragon a messenger of the devil) do not upset the general tone of the narrative, which is that of an adventure of a knight against a fierce animal. Claude Lecouteux compares this dragon description to entries in the works of natural history examined above and finds many similarities.⁶³ Even if Wirnt were attempting a Christian allegory, pressed by the increasingly popular dragon=devil equation, the narrative falls short of this goal. The result is the dragon story common in most romances, delighting in an adventure with a monster.

Thus, we can return to the later English romances knowing that in this genre dragon stories can very easily be

⁶¹ Wirnt von Grafenberg, Wigalois: The Knight of Fortune's Wheel, trans. J. W. Thomas (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), pp. 156ff. See illustration nos. 180-82 in Loomis, Arthurian Legends.

⁶² Wirnt von Grafenberg, pp. 38-47.

⁶³ Claude Lecouteux, "Der Drache," Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur, 108 (1979), 23-31.

treated non-symbolically. Much of the plentiful material can be found in metrical romances.⁶⁴ Two examples will adequately demonstrate the dragon motif's evolution in this kind of English work. In Torrent of Portyngale,⁶⁵ amidst giants and griffins (sometimes confused with dragons), we come across two separate encounters with dragons. Torrent disposes of one owned by a giant by first cutting up its tail (seven yards long) which we are told has a second head on it, amphisbaena style:

On the tayle an hed ther wase,
That byrned Bryght as anny glase,
In fyer whan yt was dyght.
A-bowght the schyld he lappyd yt ther,
Torrent the bowght a-sondyr schere
Thurrow the grace of god almyght.
As the boke of Rome tellys,
Of hys taylle he cut IIII elles
With hys swerd so bryght. (ll. 552-60)

Later, after many more adventures, Torrent happens upon two more dragons. A good Christian knight, he prays to God for help--much the same as in the saints' lives, which undoubtedly inspired this episode, and yet the accent is quite clearly on his military prowess and the dragons are incidental to the story:

⁶⁴ For a listing, see Gerald Bordman, Motif-Index of the English Metrical Romances, Folklore Fellows Communications, Vol. 79, no. 190 (Helsinki, 1963), pp. 18-20.

⁶⁵ Torrent of Portyngale, re-ed. E. Adam, EETS, e.s. Vol. 51 (London: Trübner, 1887).

He herd in a valey
 A dynnyng and a yell.
 Theder than riduth he,
 To loke, what thing it myȝt be,
 What adventure thare be-fell.
 It were two dragons stiff and strong,
 Vppon theyre lay they sat and song,
 Be-side a depe well. (ll. 1486-93)

In these passages, the dragon motif is exploited only because the creature has become a popular opponent for romance heroes. It remains on the animal level despite the repeated dragon=devil sign persistent in the saint's life and the dragon=historical person or place sign which continued throughout the Middle Ages in heraldry and culminated in literature in Malory's tales. Torrent's episodes were also not designed to stand on a symbolic level. They are almost fleeting references to characters--dragons--which have become expected in a hero's life and which make up his world.

The English metrical poem Kyng Alisaunder⁶⁶ demonstrates the same tendency, but this time the material is such that we are able to see its roots and appreciate how the medieval world amalgamated the traditions in which the motif occurred. The legend of Alexander the Great in the Middle Ages is as strange a phenomenon as that of Prester John. In this Middle English version, the dragon motif recurs in unexpected contexts. First, we find that Alexander's mother was

⁶⁶ Kyng Alisaunder, ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS, o.s. Vol. 227 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952; rpt. 1961).

impregnated by the astrologer Neptanalous in the guise of a dragon (pretending to be Jupiter) because Olympias had dreamed of such an incident:

Hire pou3t adragon a down ly3t
 To hire chaumbre he made his fly3t
 Jn he cam to hire bour
 And crepe vndur hire couertour
 Mony sipes he hire kust
 And faste in his armes he hire preost
 And went away so dragon wild
 And grete he laft hire wip child. (ll. 345-52)

Philip dreamed of his wife's infidelity in terms of a dragon and griffin (ll. 384ff.). Soon after in the narrative a dragon flies into Philip's court:

For adragon com yn fleon
 Swipe grisly on to seon
 His taile was fyue fedme long
 Be fuyr out at his moup sprong. (ll. 540-43)

The creature, unicorn-like, harmlessly lays its head in a lady's (the queen's?) bosom. This event precipitates many omens of wild beasts, climaxing in a great dragon's dying because it could not return to its shell. The portent was thus interpreted:

By pis grete dragon,
 Hit by tokenip beo quenis sone
 Be ay is round and signefiep
 He schal haue be sourmountye
 Bis is round be myddellerd
 Bope of lewed and of lerid
 Bat he schal wemde of londe feor
 Grete and come neor and neor
 He schal beo ppisond saun return
 Of his own traitour
 Bat signifiep be dragonet. (ll. 587-98)

Alexander himself is the dragon just as Arthur is in Malory. The dreams about the conception of the great man include dragons and griffins just as Malory's dreams. Now a dragon is used to portend the journeys of Alexander. On these journeys, we remember from the Old English Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle,⁶⁷ the king and his men were beset by an army of serpents of different colours, some with more than one head. The romance relates these same adventures clearly specifying "dragons": "Pan comen dragouns flynge. . . . Pise dragons weren of diuers coloure. . . . And þoo comen þe addren smale" until finally:

Ac now hem comeþ a wonder hard--
 From þe mountayn swiche a soun
 As al þe werlde shulde adoun,
 And fyre flyngyng also clere
 As al þe werlde were on fyre.
 Þoo nas þere non of so good loos
 Þat in herte hym agroos,
 Jt nas no wonder, for dragouns it ware!
 Summe two, summe þre heuedes bare,
 Þat grisely whistleden and blasten,
 And of her mouþe fyre out casten.

(ll. 5330-40)

We have come almost full circle. The dragons found in some of the earliest travel accounts, translated through nearly fifteen centuries, now find themselves only slightly transformed, more glorious, perhaps, and more truly dragons, yet still marvellous animals. In the same work, the dragon

⁶⁷ See above, p. 116.

is operating as portent.

Dragons appear in such varying circumstances because, as we have seen, they originate in quite disparate sources. Writers of the later romances, comfortable with the predominant attributes of the creature for hundreds of years, easily exploited the dragon motif as fierce opponent and often as banner or sign.

D. Beowulf

In the study of the dragon in medieval English literature, and perhaps any medieval literature, all roads lead to the Beowulf dragon. Whatever the date of the composition of the poem (even a date as late as that of the manuscript--c. 1000 A.D.),⁶⁸ the Beowulf dragon is still the earliest occurrence of one of the few full treatments of the dragon motif in medieval literature. Hundreds of lines of heroic verse are devoted to the creature and the combat, providing modern scholars with ample opportunity for understanding the medieval literary use of the dragon, or, as it seems, ample opportunity for controversy.

⁶⁸ The date of the poem is much debated. See Norman F. Blake, "The Dating of Old English Poetry," in An English Miscellany Presented to W. S. Mackie, ed. Brian L. Lee (Cape Town, London, New York), pp. 14-27. Also see the papers prepared for the conference on the date of Beowulf's composition, Toronto, April 1980, soon to be published.

The inch-by-inch critical progress of many perceptive scholars has engendered a passion in anyone studying the Beowulf dragon today for the history of its criticism.⁶⁹

69. A good summary of opinions is found in Adrien Bonjour, "Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant: Or the Beowulf Dragon Debated," PMLA, 68 (1953), 304-12, and the "Aftermath" to the same article, rpt. Twelve Beowulf Papers, 1940-60 (Genève: Faculté des Lettres Neuchâtel, 1962), pp. 97-113. The following works include most of the major arguments: Karl Müllenhoff, Beowulf (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1889); F. W. Panzer, Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte: Beowulf (München: Beck'sche, 1910); W. Lawrence, "The Haunted Mere in Beowulf," PMLA, 27 (1912), 208-45, and "The Dragon and His Lair in Beowulf," PMLA, 33 (1918), 547-83; J. R. R. Tolkien, Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics, Gollancz Lecture, 1936 (London: British Academy, 1960); Kemp Malone, "Beowulf," English Studies, 29 (1948), 161-72; T. M. Gang, "Approaches to Beowulf," Review of English Studies, 3 (1952), 1-12; R. L. Reynolds, "Note on Beowulf's Date and Economic-Social History," in Studi in Onore di Armando Saporì (Milan: Instituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1957), pp. 175-78; Kenneth Sisam, "Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon," Review of English Studies, 9 (1958), 129-40; R. E. Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," Studies in Philology, 55 (1958), 423-56; N. K. Chadwick, "The Monster and Beowulf," in The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their Culture, ed. P. Clemoes (London: Bowes, 1959), pp. 171-203; D. Gillam, "The Use of the Term 'Aeglæca' in Beowulf at Lines 893 and 2593," Studia Germanica Gandensia, 3 (1961), 145-69; S. M. Wiersma, "A Linguistic Analysis of Words Referring to Monsters in Beowulf," Dissertation Abstracts, 22 (1961), 570; F. Wild, "Drachen im Beowulf und andere Drachen," Sitzungsberichte der österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. K. 238 (Vienna, 1962), no. 5; R. E. Kaske, "Eotenas in Beowulf," in Old English Poetry, ed. R. P. Creed (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1967), pp. 285-310; N. K. Kiessling, "Grendel: A New Aspect," Modern Philology, 65 (1968), 191-201; G. N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson, Beowulf and Its Analogues (London: Dent, 1968); A. M. Arent, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets; Beowulf, and Grettis Saga," in Old Norse Literature and Mythology, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 130-99; N. Peltola, "Grendel's Descent from Cain Reconsidered," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 73 (1972), 284-91; S. C. Bandy, "Cain, Grendel and the Giants of Beowulf," Papers on Language and Literature, 9 (1973), 235-49; C. T. Berkhout, "Beowulf 3123b: Under the Malice-Roof," Papers

After all these years, I think the question remains fundamentally the same: does the dragon symbolize something, and if so, what? The problem is that no one quite likes anyone else's answer.

My suggestion is to tilt our understanding of the medieval literary use of monsters in light of the material presented above to the point where we become more comfortable with the significant role of the dragon in Beowulf. Medieval writers were clever at handling monster motifs and the best illustration of this is the Old English Beowulf. The poem, besides being a good story involving a monstrous animal, is so written that it allows additional meanings to be drawn from the dragon episode, as I will demonstrate below. Therefore, I would place it firmly on the symbolic level of interpretation. The animal level is insufficient because of the motif's capacity for additional meanings. The sign level

on Language and Literature, 9 (1973), 428-31; F. C. Robinson, "Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf," in Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope, ed. R. Burlin and E. Irving, Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 119-38; S. L. Dragland, "Monster-Man in Beowulf," Neophilologus, 61 (1977), 606-18; Lars Malmberg, "Grendel and the Devil," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 78 (1977), 241-43; W. Helder, "Beowulf and the Plundered Hoard," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 78 (1977), 317-25; D. Williams, "Aspects du rôle médiateur des monstres," Studies in Religion, 6 (1976-77), 267-68; J. Oetgen, "Order and Chaos in the World of Beowulf," American Benedictine Review, 29 (1978), 134-52; C. Lecouteux, "Der Drache," Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur, 108 (1979), 13-31.

is equally inappropriate because (1) the dragon is a defined character in the narrative, complete with its animal nature and (2) no one meaning for the dragon will suffice.

Much of the difficulty in understanding the dragon's role in Beowulf stems from our feeling compelled to view the dragon as animal or sign. The subtlety of the symbolic level, so easily recognized in regard to other motifs, often eludes us when dealing with works involving fabulous creatures, because monsters make such good signs. They seem (and often are) tailor-made for representing any specific, at times didactic, point an author could wish to make. Witness the Apocalyptic dragon. If the idea is to represent seven kings, give the creature seven heads.

As a symbol, the motif must first participate strongly in the narrative as the animal which it is. The medieval perception of monsters is important here. Dorothy Whitelock tells us that "The average man would believe in the monsters, in the creatures of evil lurking in the waste lands round him."⁷⁰

The Beowulf dragon, like Grendel, his mother, and Beowulf himself, is a character in the narrative. It lives, breathes and dies like the latter three characters. For all we know, the poet might not have even thought the creature--

⁷⁰ The Audience of Beowulf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 71-72.

a giant serpent which flies, breathes fire and guards a treasure--the least bit fabulous. As we have seen, authoritative encyclopedias, travel accounts and exegesis support the creature's existence. Even if the poet were creating a fabulous being (or borrowing an admittedly fabulous creature from another source), it is still a solid character in the narrative and is subject to its natural environment just as Beowulf himself is. The creature does not vanish in a puff of smoke at its demise; its carcass is realistically and ingloriously shoved over the cliff.⁷¹ The dragon is an animal in the poem. Like Alexander combatting his army of næddran in his journey east, Beowulf is required to take practical measures.

Since the dragon motif in Beowulf is used as a symbol, not a sign, it also signifies more than one thing. Therefore, for its audience, Beowulf's dragon was a symbol of chaos, of evil, of pride, of greed and probably more, but all at the same time.

The poem concentrates on three heroic episodes of Beowulf. Amidst these, tales of past and future, tales of known and unknown figures, foreigners and countrymen, tales

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" . . . dracan ec scufun,
 wurm ofer weallclif, leton weg niman,
 flod flæðmian frætwa hyrde"

(Beowulf, ll. 3131b-3133).

All Beowulf quotations are taken from Klaeber's 3rd edition.

of conflict, personal grief, noble and ignoble deeds, fill out the narrative, give substance, completeness and systems of value to this poetic world. In the present time of the narrative, we see Beowulf destroying progressively more dangerous, monstrous opponents in the combats with Grendel, Grendel's mother and, finally, the dragon. These are the episodes which dominate the narrative. They provide detail and suspense and demand the greater part of the reader's attention and consideration. By the time of the dragon section, we have witnessed the power, nobility and vulnerability of the man Beowulf. We have seen him in his youth wrestle with the inhuman Grendel and wrench off his arm. The next day our hero, triumphant, is informed that the hall which he had assumed was purged was invaded by yet another monster which carried away a beloved thane. Immediately Beowulf sets out to destroy the second monster. With the lifeless, mangled body of the victim Æschere haunting the lines, we follow Beowulf's near-fatal underwater victory over the murderous mother of Grendel.

He is young, strong, heroic, full of the highest attributes of a leader of men. The story, nevertheless, allows some human weakness to permeate; Beowulf's prowess could not prevent Æschere's death. All is repeated to Hygelac, not only to emphasize and ingrain the story in our memories, but also to make Beowulf's deeds and fame a part of the Geat kingdom. We are made aware that the poem is not of a wandering

hero, but of a man whose fate is destined to be intertwined with one kingdom, and the narrative leads us to this point.

The old king Beowulf, with his past prowess so vivid in our minds, must now attempt to repeat his heroics to save his land from the ravages of the dragon. We are suddenly conscious of the responsibility of the man, the inevitability of the combat, as Beowulf is told of the dragon's deeds. The past two-thirds of the poem become a preface to this final combat. Grendel, his mother, the years of fealty to Hygelac, the fifty years of reign are held in contrast to this old man who, through his own magnificent code of honour, must attempt a deed which would have been awesome to the young Beowulf. As before, as always, the man relies on his sense of duty, his courage and his weapons. The first two, as in combats before, do not fail him, but the third does.⁷²

Beowulf's final combat ends in a draw, with both Beowulf and the dragon dead. Because of its symbolic meanings, a dragon is Beowulf's bane, not another troll-like creature. Similarly, because of its symbolic meanings, the poet allows a dragon to cause the tragedy in the end of the poem--a tragedy which stems not only from the death of a great man, but also from the destruction of a kingdom, as Wiglaf heralds in ll. 2299-3003. Finally, because of its symbolic meanings,

⁷² Beowulf's sword failed him in his fight with Grendel's dam, l. 1524, and in his combat with the dragon, l. 2584.

it becomes inevitable that Beowulf must die.

The poet might have cast a dragon in the role because the legend he heard or read specified a dragon. Or, paradoxically, the familiar dragon would make the story more realistic to his audience than a monster of his own invention. Or the literary dragon or dragon-fight is accompanied by connotations which conveniently amplify his poem's themes. I think that all three reasons are likely. The dragon-fight is commonplace. Nearly every aspect of the Beowulf dragon can be found in earlier literature.⁷³ The poem invites comparison.

The Christian poet knew that the Apocalyptic dragon would be recalled. The good Beowulf, almost saintly, brandishes sword against the evil serpent much as the archangel Michael did. The dragon is the devil, everything evil which threatens the good hero and his kingdom. Yet the similarities between the story of Beowulf and the Babylonian Creation Myth⁷⁴ invite us to consider an alternative interpretation. The versions of the myth available in the Middle Ages had

⁷³ R. W. Chambers, with supp. by C. L. Wrenn, Beowulf, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), pp. 93-97. See also my paper, "The Beowulf Dragon as a Dating Tool," prepared for the Beowulf Conference, Toronto, April 1980.

⁷⁴ The Babylonian Epic of Creation, ed. and trans. S. Langdon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923). For a detailed comparison, see above, Chapter IV, pp. 198-99.

both Tiamat and Bel (Marduk) die.⁷⁵ The dragon is chaos, Beowulf is order, order for his kingdom. Further, similarities between the Beowulf dragon fight and classical mythology, the Great Dragon Combat of Fontenrose,⁷⁶ reassert that the dragon symbolizes destruction. The dragon's commonplace attributes are found in many such creatures in folktales which mean no more than death or failure to the hero. All these interpretations are valid and can be traced more precisely in the poem.

We remember that the lone survivor of an ancient race left the wealth of his people unguarded. The dragon finds the "hoard-joy" and the creature, at this point, is described peculiarly: "He must seek in the earth a hoard. There he will guard heathen gold, wise in winters. He is none the better for it."⁷⁷ We learn something interesting about the creature. He is a victim of fate just as Beowulf himself is. He was assigned this duty, just as the dragon in the fable, the Fox and the Dragon, was.⁷⁸ But, just like this dragon, so

⁷⁵ See Robert J. Menner, "Nimrod and the Wolf in the Old English Solomon and Saturn," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 37 (1938), 344-50, for texts which transmitted the myth, and below, pp. 300-01.

⁷⁶ Fontenrose, pp. 524-34.

⁷⁷ ". . . He gesecean sceall
(ho)r(d on) hrusan, þær he hæðen gold
warað wintrum froð; ne byð him wihte ðy sel"
(ll. 2275b-2277).

⁷⁸ Aesopica, ed. Ben Edwin Perry, I (Urbana: University

too the Beowulf dragon guards a treasure which does him no good. Note line 3059 where, after the death of both combatants, the worm is once again condemned for "unrightly" hoarding the gold. He is the miser, a personification of greed. This fits into an analysis of the entire poem. Beowulf represents balance. Gold is power, the most visible manifestation of stability and wealth to the Geats. A good lord doles out gold to the worthy. The dragon's gold is buried; it serves no purpose. The balance is upset.

Since gold is power, it represents control over destiny as all wealth does to a degree. The gold is much like the Tablets of Destiny uselessly guarded by Tiamat, or the golden fleece, golden apples or magical trees guarded by many dragons throughout literature. The dragon is a specific evil--greed. Beowulf as king, as exemplar, must restore balance. Both a reading of the poem and its mythological resonances indicate this.

But the dragon is not only greed. A few lines down, after the worm discovers that his domain has been invaded, before he discovers the theft (which would be the miser's incentive for retribution), we see the initial cause of strife:

of Illinois Press, 1952), Lat. no. 518, and see above, Chapter I, p. 17.

The hoardguard sought eagerly over the ground; he would find the man who, while he slept had sorely done him injury. Hot and fierceminded, he often moved all around outside of the barrow; nor was there any man in the wilderness. He rejoiced in war, in the work of fighting.⁷⁹

"He rejoiced in war, in the work of fighting." The dragon is pure destruction. The theft of the cup aggravates the situation, but the trespassing of the thane was enough to produce this war-machine. Beowulf's kingdom is now attacked by the greatest animal power, the greatest creature on earth according to Isidore, the epitome of military threats. It is an enemy capable of more destruction than an army of men, yet nicely concentrated in one huge body in order to test the fibre of Beowulf, whose story this truly is. The dragon makes the scene concise. No war rambles on; one magnificent symbol of destruction slays Beowulf. The single champion faces the single dragon, constructing a succinct poetic statement which invites interpretation.

The dragon vomits flames, shows his grim warfare. Then:

He hastened back to the hoard, the hidden splendid hall before daybreak. He had encircled the land-

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" . . . Hord weard sohte
georne æfter grunde wolde guman findan,
þone þe him on sweofote sare geteode;
hat ond hreohmod hlæw oft ymbehwearf
ealne utanweardne; ne ðær ænig mon
on þære westenne,-- hwære wiges gefeh,
bea(du) [we] weorces . . ." (ll. 2293b-2299a).

dwellers in flame, fire and burning. He trusted his barrow, his valour and his wall: His expectation deceived him.⁸⁰

Pride, the classic flaw, the vice so immediately associated with the fallen angel Lucifer, the initial harbourer of the sin, the antiquus serpens himself, now is attributed to the Beowulf dragon. Up to now we have seen a victim of fate, a creature whose simple nature guided his awesome deeds. Now the dragon is imbued with the complicated human vice--pride. The dragon must die because of its pride.

However, in lines 2329-31, Beowulf believes the dragon is the hand of God punishing him for his misdeeds. Those last lines of the poem may be less enigmatic than we think. Was Beowulf, indeed, "of world-kings, the mildest of men and the gentlest, kindest to his people," and truly "most eager for fame"? His single-handed combat with the dragon appears to be based on foolhardy pride when we view it as an old man's attempt to recapture the glory of his youth as embodied in the two previous monster fights. His pride, then, in the form of the dragon, kills him.

These two readings--the dragon as a proud creature and

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" . . . hord eft gesceat,
dryht sele dyrnne ær dages hwile.
Hæfde landwara lige befangen,
bæle ond bronde; beorges getruwode,
wiges ond wealles; him seo wen geleaf"
(11. 2319b-2323).

Compare the dragon's trust in his barrow to Hroðgar's trust in Heorot, 11. 64-85.

therefore doomed, and the dragon as the representation of Beowulf's pride and therefore both are doomed--are in harmony if the writer is poetically investigating all repercussions of this particular vice. Interpreted as such, the poem challenges C. S. Lewis' rigid distinction between symbolism (the dragon as a proud creature) and allegory (the dragon as Beowulf's pride),⁸¹ or, if not challenges, at least illustrates the two methods operating side by side.

The creature, however, is not just pride; it is chaos. Beowulf's "greatest of heart-sorrows" comes when he first hears that the dragon destroyed his hall. "His breast swelled within with dark thoughts--not customary for him. The flame dragon had destroyed the seaboard, the stronghold of the people, crushed the stronghold with flames."⁸² A few lines down we are told the outcome of the combat. Beowulf was to come to the end of his days, the worm with him. The creature had struck home, the stronghold, the kingdom itself. Grendel and his mother attacked Hroðgar's hall; it was Hroðgar's tragedy. Now the attack is on Beowulf's kingdom. The outcome is already determined. Both will die. By destroying

⁸¹ The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 45-48.

⁸² ". . . breost innan weoll
 beostrum geponcum, swa him gebywe ne was.
 Hæfde ligdraca leoda fasten,
 ealond utan, eorðweard ðone
 gledum forgrunden . . ." (ll. 2331b-2335a).

the stronghold, the dragon represents the chaos which Beowulf had spent his lifetime trying to overcome.

Each of these passages evokes an interpretation which can be successfully applied to the entire poem. The dragon, a true symbol, projects rays of meanings, not just any meaning, which would result in no meaning at all, but a number of valid interpretations which enrich the poem without putting a stranglehold on our understanding of it.

The specific passages examined above illustrate the symbolic meanings generated by the dragon motif in Beowulf. We can set up three general criteria for determining the interpretive level of a work. Investigation of (1) the wording, (2) the characterization and (3) the overall structure of the work often tells the reader whether or not a particular motif should be read on a symbolic level.

In Beowulf, the wording, characterization and overall structure all point to a certain ambivalence of values in regard to the dragon. This ambivalence is critical to a full appreciation of the symbolic dragon in Beowulf and can be traced in all three areas. Inherent within the poem itself, the ambivalence produces a portrayal of reality conducive to alternative interpretations. Understanding this fluctuation aids us in accepting the rays of meaning which the symbol produces. Although the motif in one sense represents greed, in another, chaos, we see by the evidence below

that the treatment of the motif in Beowulf is such that it is ambivalent enough not only to allow different meanings, but demands them as the most truthful way to represent Beowulf's complex situation.

Wording

The words used to denote the creature in the poem must be considered carefully. Our perception of monsters differs from the medieval man's. We cannot even be sure of the kind of creatures these writers had in mind. The draca cannot always be distinguished from the ubiquitous and sometimes non-fabulous draco. Nor do the vernacular cognates always denote our conception of the fabulous creature, as Nilsson insisted.⁸³ Further, the fabulous is not necessarily the symbolic, as I have demonstrated above.

Once we marshal evidence, internal and external, to determine the denotation of the words draca and wyrm, we must then do the same for their connotation. At this point we are verging on symbol. The animals of the early fables are halfway between the animal and symbol levels because the use--often repetitious--of an animal in specific situations results in the accumulation of associations (the fox is

⁸³ See above, Chapter I, n. 24.

clever; the fox is cleverness) which enable the motif to be used symbolically in later works.

Demonstrably, the Anglo-Saxons could have written draca or wurm and meant other things as well. Can we merely refer to exegetical interpretations of the dragon (some written well after the composition of Beowulf) to see how the commentators interpreted dragons, and therefore how a Christian poet might have? We will find the dragon representing, besides the devil or evil, consummate animal power, secret attack, open attack, luxuria, pride, uninhabitable wastelands, a pursuer of chastity, venomous tyrants and beauty on the outside and wickedness within.⁸⁴

Even if we negate all other possible influences on the poet's symbolic tendencies and assume that because he was Christian, the poem must indulge in Christian didacticism for all its themes, we still cannot be sure which of the above interpretations of dragons (and these are only a sample) we are expected to adopt in regard to Beowulf's dragon. Similarly, we might assume that the Beowulf poet relied on the Physiologus interpretation of the dragon, which is entirely feasible in light of the Old English poetic Panther.⁸⁵ This

⁸⁴ See above, Chapter III, p. 170.

⁸⁵ The Exeter Book: The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia, 1936), pp. 169-71, ll. 16, 57, draca.

later, possibly ninth-century, faithful translation of the Latin Physiologus entry clearly demonstrates the Englishman's knowledge of the story of the dragon/devil as the one enemy of the panther/Christ. Yet these connections seem strained.

Arthur E. DuBois, in a short article on the symbolism of the dragon in Beowulf, discussed the possible ways in which an image becomes a symbol.⁸⁶ He explained the technique operating in those works in which an "essay" is included, leaving little doubt about the meaning of the image. He gives as an example the biblical equation of the Pharaoh and a dragon (Ezech. 29:3). The Physiologus accomplishes the same thing in a similarly mechanical manner. He contends that this kind of "bad writing" is not found in Beowulf and that the poem's symbols acquire meaning against context.⁸⁷

This is an important point. It clearly divides the more straightforward symbolizations examined above in the non-fictive genres (bestiaries, exegesis) from the artistically subtle symbolization we witness in Beowulf. For this reason

⁸⁶ Arthur E. DuBois, "The Dragon in Beowulf," PMLA, 72 (1957), 819-22. In his initial remarks, DuBois speculates that Jung would agree with Freud in that the dragon represents a sex-dread. This is wrong. Jung thought the dragon a symbol of the feminine, the womb, the creative drive, primordial unconsciousness and the destructive and life-giving power of water. See Jolande Jacobi, Complex, Archetype and Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1959), p. 146.

⁸⁷ DuBois, pp. 820-22.

we should turn to Old English poetic uses of draca and wyrm to see if the dragon, for Anglo-Saxon writers, was more often than not symbolic or representing evil or the devil.

By far, the two words used most frequently to describe the dragon in Beowulf are wyrm and draca.⁸⁸ Detailed studies of the evolution of meanings of these two words and their cognates reveal complex shiftings of denotation.⁸⁹ The relatively few occurrences of draca in Old English literature reveal a variety of uses which can be examined here.⁹⁰

In Christ and Satan (late eighth, early ninth century),⁹¹ Satan himself speaks of the dragons which stand guard at the gates of hell (Æce æt helle duru dracan eardigað, ll. 97-98).

⁸⁸ wyrm--18 times: 2287, 2307, 2316, 2343, 2348, 2400, 2519, 2567, 2629, 2669, 2705, 2745, 2759, 2771, 2827, 2902, 3039, 3132, wyrmhord 2221.
draca--4 times: 2211, 2290, 2402, 3131, eorðdraca 2713, fyrdraca 2689, legdraca 3040, ligdraca 2333, niðdraca 2273. Other descriptive appellations are: aglæcan 2520, 2534, 2557, 2905 (with B.), 2592, attorsceaðan 2839, feond 2706, ferhðegenðlan 2881, gæst 2312, goldweard 3081, gryrefahne 2576, gryregieste 2560, guðflogan 2528, guðsceaða 2318, hringboðan 2561, inwitgæst 2670, lyftfloga 2315, mansceaða 2514, niðgæst 2699, peodsceaða 2278, 2688, uhtflogan 2760, uhtsceaða 2271, weard mundbora 2779, widflogan 2346, 2830.

⁸⁹ See Lecouteux, pp. 15-23; Wild, pp. 3-16.

⁹⁰ Since it is not altogether certain that the composition of Beowulf is early (seventh or eighth century), the poems traditionally thought to be written after Beowulf may have influenced the poet and as such may help in this investigation.

⁹¹ The Junius Manuscript: Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records I, ed. George Philip Krapp (New York: Columbia, 1931), pp. 135-58.

Dracan here presumably means demons of some sort, not the antiquus serpens himself. Yet a few lines down, continuing the description of hell, the poet mentions the hiss of adders (nedran, l. 101) and serpents (wyrmas, l. 102). Much later in the poem, the three creatures occur together again in a description of hell: dracan, næddran and wyrma, ll. 335-36. The draca is not the devil but an unpleasant creature which suitably would be found at the gates of hell along with other serpents. Possibly the guardian aspect of the creature was in the poet's mind. A clear association with "demon" cannot even be made here.

Of course, draca does mean demon or Satan in some Old English poems. Elene⁹² describes the evil angels' fall from heaven into the death-anguish of the dragon's embrace: dregap deapcuale in dracan fæome (l. 765). Solomon and Saturn⁹³ offers the old metaphor in saying, "the devil on doomsday, the terrible dragon" (deofol on domdæge, draca egeslice-- ll. 25-26). The Apocalyptic dragon is undoubtedly in mind.

Of greater interest is another use of draca in the same

⁹² The Vercelli Book: Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records II, ed. George Philip Krapp (New York: Columbia, 1932), pp. 66-102.

⁹³ Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems: Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records VI, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia, 1942), pp. 31-48. See also The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus, ed. and trans. John M. Kemble (London: Elfric Society, 1848).

poem. In Book II of this curious poem dramatically pitting Christian wisdom (Solomon) against pagan wisdom (Saturn), we find Solomon asking Saturn, who is apparently well-travelled, about the land where no man dare go. Saturn, then, in a passage which has since been of critical interest, tells a short tale of the sailor over the sea, the noble one named Wandering Wolf, the friend of Nimrod. "He slew upon the plain twenty-five dragons at daybreak and then death took him" (He on ðam felda ofslog xxv dracena on dægred, and hine ða deað offeoll--11. 215-16). No man thenceforth may enter that place; there the poisonous race first arose . . . over his burial mound, his sword hilts glimmer.

On first glance, one notes the similarity to the dragons in travel accounts, especially since the episode follows a list of place names. Compare the Old English Wonders of the East,⁹⁴ where the land of dragons is the land where no man treads. This prose account, then, is not an isolated use of draca in this sense. Dragons for the Anglo-Saxons were sometimes the creatures of the uninhabitable wastelands which the exegetes and, for that matter, the Scriptures, claimed: "And Babylon will be in ruins, the home of dragons, numbness and hissing--that place where it is uninhabitable" (Jeremiah 51:37).

⁹⁴ See above, Chapter III, p. 117.

But the connections do not stop here. Robert J. Menner, in his analysis of this passage, makes some very interesting points. Besides associating the "poisonous race" with the race of Cain, a connection which is now thoroughly pursued by critics in regard to Grendel and his dam,⁹⁵ he also, in attempting to identify the character Wolf, follows the Nimrod reference.⁹⁶ Nimrod was often confused with Bel (Marduk) and the Wolf passage is remarkably like medieval versions of the Babylonian Creation Myth in which Bel cuts off his own head after conquering the dragoness of chaos and her demons. The gods then mix his blood (not Kingu's as in the ancient version) and man is created.⁹⁷

The implications of this connection are great. Menner demonstrates that the myth is known to the Anglo-Saxons and speculates that the poet of Solomon and Saturn uses certain elements of it. Wolf kills dragons, dies, and a poisonous race is born.⁹⁸ Here are dragons which are not only not

⁹⁵ See esp. Ruth Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf: Part I, Noachic Tradition," in Anglo-Saxon England, 8, ed. P. Clemoes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 143-62.

⁹⁶ Robert J. Menner, "Nimrod and the Wolf in the Old English Solomon and Saturn," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 37 (1938), 332-54.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 344-46.

⁹⁸ Perhaps a poisonous race of serpents; cf. Ovid, Met. IV, 617-20, where Medusa's blood spawns dragons.

Satan, or Christian demons, they are possibly not just poisonous menacing animals. They could be a reference, albeit garbled, to ancient Mesopotamian mythology.

This opens more doors in the search for the denotation and connotation of dragon terms in medieval English literature. The symbolic resources of the English were not limited to patristic writings. Since the motif appears in so many mythic and folkloristic sources and since the English poets could well have been indulging in symbolizations from non-Christian sources, we must expand our interpretations to suit. The poet of Beowulf might have been aware of some versions of the Babylonian Creation Myth--at least the medieval versions wherein the hero as well as the dragon dies.

The Cottom Maxims line tells us "the dragon, proud of his treasure will be in the barrow." This line and the line from the beginning of the Finnsburg fragment⁹⁹ are often distinguished from the Christian or "travel account" references to the beast. The young king in the Fight at Finnsburg reports that the light (presumably) from the east is not the dawn, "nor does a dragon fly hither," nor is the hall burning . . . but it is a sudden attack (ll. 1-7).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ In Klaeber, p. 245, l. 3: "Ne ðis ne dagað eastan, ne her draca ne fleogeð."

¹⁰⁰ Cf. the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry of 793 (above, p. 180) with the fiery dragons flying over Northumbria as omens.

Critics classify these as either heroic, Germanic or folkloristic dragons evolved from sources other than the encyclopedia-travel account or biblical traditions traced in the previous chapters. Claude Lecouteux simply states that in the Middle Ages two traditions were operating: the learned and the vulgar. Beowulf's dragon draws from both.¹⁰¹ This distinction is valid and heuristically convenient in an organized presentation of material, but I wonder if it would not seem as artificial to a medieval audience as Whitelock contended that the distinction between "historical" and "fabulous" elements would have been.¹⁰² Would the "Germanic folkloristic dragon" produce a different image from the dragon of Latin learning in the minds of Beowulf's audience? Certain attributes are passed back and forth and, more importantly, common appellations are used.

The word wurm, most frequently used by the Beowulf poet to refer to the dragon, is even more flexibly rendered by

¹⁰¹ "... es in Mittelalter zwei Traditionsebenen gab, eine gelehrte und vulgäre, die einander beeinflussten. Dies bedeutet, dass zahlreiche Unterschiede in der Beschreibung des Drachen auf die Anknüpfung an die eine oder an die andere sowie auf deren Vermischung zurückgehen..." (Lecouteux, p. 22). This is in accord with Wild's statement (pp. 26-27) that the Beowulf poet uses Latin learning but also borrows from the Germanic dragon fight for his story. Yet both critics base a great deal of their evaluation of the literary dragon on the Latin traditions. Lecouteux analyzes the thirteenth-century Wigalois according to natural history texts and Wild expends much effort drawing comparisons between Beowulf and Ovid's version of the Cadmus dragon fight.

¹⁰² Whitelock, pp. 71-72.

translators than draca. It could mean an earthworm as in Riddle 40, a bookworm, as in Riddle 47, or even a silkworm, as in Riddle 35.¹⁰³ wyrm is likewise used in Genesis¹⁰⁴ in apposition to nædre to denote Satan as the serpent of Paradise (ll. 899, 903ff.). We saw in Christ and Satan that the wyrm inhabits hell as do the draca and nædre. In Guth-lac,¹⁰⁵ demons besetting the saint take on the shape of men and the form of the wyrm, spewing poison (ll. 910-12).

These examples carry the meanings "worm" or "snake" and are sometimes associated with demons and Satan. In line 82 of Solomon and Saturn, we read that the word of God is the wyrma wælm, wildeora holt, "the swelling of worms, the forest of the wild beast." Earlier (l. 79), the word of God was "the shield of the guilty," so these statements make a certain sense, whether wyrm is translated as worm, snake or dragon (whose poison easily swells the creature, as we have seen in Ovid).

¹⁰³ The Exeter Book, No. 40: p. 202, l. 76; No. 47: p. 205, l. 3; No. 35: p. 198, l. 9.

¹⁰⁴ The Junius Manuscript, pp. 3-87. This is the passage where the serpent is doomed to wander "feðeleas" (footless). See Genesis A: A New Edition, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 244, n. 908a, for a note on this "loss of legs" belief "not prominent in the Latin tradition."

¹⁰⁵ The Exeter Book, pp. 49-88.

Similarly, the wyrm found in the Old English Metrical Charm #2¹⁰⁶ might be productively translated "dragon."

Called The Nine Herbs Charm, the verse talks of the herb

which strove against the worm (l. 18). Later (l. 31) the

wyrm com snican, toslat he man, "the worm came crawling,

split the man. Then Woden took up the nine glory-twigs and

struck the næddran so that it flew into nine parts. . . ."

I think this enigmatic, perhaps confused passage originally

may have been repeating a cosmogonic story involving the

division of the carcass of a dragon or serpent. The dragon's

magical properties may also make the creature a likely trans-

lation of wyrm in this charm. Further, the wyrmfah of Beo-

wulf (l. 1698) could as easily mean "decorated with dragons"

as "decorated with serpents," as fabulous kinds of zoomorphic ornamentation on northern artifacts were quite common.

These observations are not meant to suggest that each wyrm in Old English poetry means dragon as it seemed that

Bandy, in his article "Cain, Grendel and the Giants of Beo-
wulf," was proposing that everyone in the poem was a giant.

Bandy's emphasis was the moral ambivalence of gigantism, "the unexpectantly subtle--but thoroughly Augustinian--examination of the intertwined natures of good and evil."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, pp. 116-28.

¹⁰⁷ Bandy, p. 235. See also Kaske, "Eotenas," pp. 290-91, where the figurative force of eotena is discussed.

The audience of Beowulf did not imagine a completely evil, almost supernatural creature imbued with the connotative trappings of myth and folklore on the one hand, and a much more mundane, rather realistic, but large and dangerous species of animal described in authoritative Latin writings on the other. By flexibly using the terms draca and wurm, they more successfully and meaningfully amalgamated the traditions than we seem to do in our criticism. This is a crucial point. In amalgamating the traditions, I think they found a rich diversity of meanings symbolized by the dragon motif, a greater degree of ambivalence in values than we have hitherto assumed.

Characterization

The very words draca and wurm in Old English are used in broad contexts with far-ranging connotations, so much so that we are aware of the danger of assigning rigid definitions to them. The same ambivalence of values can be discerned in the characterization of the dragon in Beowulf.

Recently in Beowulf studies, critics have been investigating certain similarities between heroes and monsters in the poem. This conclusion was arrived at from two directions, from external and from internal evidence. Nora Chadwick, in examining Norse parallels to the story, speculated that the later Norse champion Grettir is identical to Grendel, that

somehow the monster evolved into the hero.¹⁰⁸ A few years later, Doreen Gillam published an article discussing the problematic term aglæca and its use in Beowulf. Generally translated "monster" when applied to Grendel or the dragon, the term surprisingly is used in reference to the hero Sigmund and to both Beowulf and the dragon at points in the poem. She notes that both Sigmund and Beowulf are in the act of slaying dragons when the poet refers to them using this term, emphasizing the "strange and powerful" rather than "monstrous" aspect of aglæca.¹⁰⁹

The folklore parallels led Beowulf scholars to investigate the typology of the Germanic Heldenleben. A. Margaret Arent, in demonstrating Beowulf's characteristics as archetypal hero, lists "similarity of hero and foe" as a common element in the typology.¹¹⁰

S. L. Dragland continued the enquiry into the similarities between hero and monster by returning to the poem and examining parallel descriptions of monsters and heroes. Going one step further, Dragland gives reason for this similarity: "the Beowulf-poet manipulates his story and his characters to implicitly make an ironic comment on the heroic social struc-

¹⁰⁸ Chadwick, p. 193.

¹⁰⁹ Gillam, pp. 167-68. Note Gillam's analysis of denotation and connotation of wyrm, p. 150.

¹¹⁰ Arent, p. 148.

ture his poem is based upon."¹¹¹ Slightly ambivalent characterization can easily result in irony, but, in competent hands, its more global outcome is a sophisticated representation of the fundamental complexity of nature (human or otherwise). Dragland's conclusion holds but the similarities have a greater function than social comment. The world of Beowulf acquires a tragic complexity.

Beowulf displays this tendency because it follows mythological and folkloristic patterns. The story, purposefully designed by an intuitive poet, or handed down to a poet, already in this form, reflects patterns which recur in Western literature, patterns which illuminate the inevitable nature of things. These enduring patterns allow flexible characterization. Fluctuating denotation of character, prevalent in monsters, produces fluctuating connotation. Grendel, our emblem of perfect evil, can turn around and emerge as heroic Grettir. Yet this metamorphosis was not quite as distressing to the medieval audience as it is to us today. They had no rigid dividing line between man and beast, beast and marvellous race.¹¹² Their non-fictive

¹¹¹ Dragland, p. 606.

¹¹² Augustine, in his De civitate dei (P.L. 41:485, Bk. 16, ch. 8), felt called upon to make some kind of decision on the controversial topic of the humanity of the cynocephali and other marvellous races. See above, p. 41.

attention from one character to the other compels the listener to note similarities and dissimilarities. Wording and characterization both display ambivalent attitudes toward the dragon motif in Beowulf.¹¹⁶ Dragons were not necessarily totally evil creatures in Old English poetry, nor does the Beowulf poet always draw a sharp line between our hero and the dragon.

Structure

The same moral ambivalence is stressed in the structure of the poem. Arent insisted that Beowulf has revitalized mythic topoi more than the Old Norse Grettissaga.¹¹⁶ Beowulf, I believe, strikes the reader as symbolic because it is structured more like myth than folktale. According to Frye, myths tend to obliterate the boundary between legend, historical reminiscence and history, demonstrating a drive toward a verbal circumference of human experience.¹¹⁷ Beowulf exhibits a definite control of plot and characters which many examples of written folktales lack. Each monster section is precisely placed. The combats involve few gimmicks

¹¹⁶ Arent, p. 199.

¹¹⁷ Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (Daedalus, Summer 1961; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 31-32.

and the audience knows that each deed is highly significant. The trebling of motifs common in folklore is present in Beowulf in the three monsters, Grendel, Grendel's dam and the dragon, but with a difference. The device is used to represent the struggles of different stages of a man's life as the intensity of the combats and the persistent reiteration of them illustrate. We know at the end that another dragon will not come flying over the hill. The narrative is clean and invites the symbolic interpretations given above.

The poet, in using a rich symbol, in an age when it was more properly understood, consciously or unconsciously played upon the diverse, originally mythological connotations of the motif. Beowulf, to a degree, recalls the old mythological formula of dragon=dragon-slayer. Fontenrose concludes his study of the Combat Dragon Myth in its various versions with this warning:

it becomes apparent that both creative and destructive forces are mingled on both sides of the divine combat. So myth is nearer to reality in this respect than that sort of partisanship in life or that sort of melodrama in literature which pits pure good on one side against pure evil on the other.¹¹⁸

This circumspect attitude toward wording, character and structure itself generates the literary symbol--not the sign. Thus, Beowulf's dragon was a symbol of chaos, of evil, of

¹¹⁸ Fontenrose, p. 473.

pride, of greed and probably more, and all at the same time. It is also an animal, fearfully dangerous, but peaceful for three hundred years until the rules are broken with the theft of the cup. Fate governs both opponents. The dragon is Beowulf's bane and Beowulf is the dragon's. Herein lies the poignancy, the tragedy, the artistic subtlety of the episode, and the key to its symbolism.

E. Conclusion

The figure of the dragon was born at least thousands of years ago as we know from Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets and animal-ornamented cylinder seals. Most mythologies of ancient peoples told stories of great serpentine beasts, as did many folktales circulating among the diverse cultures which contributed to our western civilization. The medieval man, in his desire to know and learn and design and yet retain and perfect the knowledge handed down to him, developed an aesthetic which welcomed a menagerie of fantastic creatures, some now forgotten, the rest alive only in our poetic allusions.

The educated man knew the dragon from documents of travel, entries in books of natural science, the Scriptures and patristic writings, bestiary picture books, tales and great literature of old cultures and mythologies, ornamentation of unknown origin and his own stories of heroes and magic.

He did not always regard the dragon coolly and certainly not always sceptically, but rightfully incorporated the creature in his own imaginative milieu of literature and art where it had thrived through millenia before. Because of its age and shifting countenance, the dragon possessed a great capacity as a literary and artistic motif. And also because of its age and shifting countenance, it is not easy for us who experience the creature's power more in a scholarly way to appreciate it or understand its nuances.

This is the problem involved in the study of the dragon which I outlined at the beginning of this investigation. The solution, in part, was to expose the modern reader rapidly to the medieval world of monsters. Then I turned to the English writers to follow their varying uses of the dragon and to demonstrate the trends the motif takes when it so frequently occurs over a number of years in material of fundamental similarity.

The dragon in literature was seen to be used as an animal character, legitimate either in a society accepting its existence or in a literary world heedless of its existence in the real world. Many adventurous stories in romance and saints' lives of the Middle Ages exploited the motif in just this way.

The dragon was also used as a symbol, in a full-blown sense in Beowulf, where a well-developed character in the narrative resonates a multiplicity of meanings belying a jejune

simplicity of values. Other works such as the Life of Saint Martha, giving less time and attention to the motif, verge on this kind of treatment, but certain meanings became so predominant that the figure moves from symbol to sign.

Throughout the Middle Ages, we see this evolution of the symbol into a sign. The 'saints' lives' interpretation of the dragon as devil persistently reinforced the equation in Christian works. The highly powerful martial connotations of the beast led it to be represented on military banners early in the medieval period and continued to be used in a parallel way in the dreams and portents of romances, especially in Malory, who punctuates great happenings with appearances of the dragon.

At every level, the dragon motif responded to some element in the medieval aesthetic which we modern readers have only begun to explore. As a serious literary and artistic motif, the dragon lived out a long-termed popularity in the minds of people who loved it or hated it with the intensity its magnitude deserved.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. St. Martha and the Dragon, limestone, c. 1515, Church at Arrelle (Aube), taken from Jacqueline Boccador, Statuaire médiévale en France de 1400 à 1530 (Zoug, Switzerland: Clefs du Temps, 1974), II, plate no. 132.
2. St. Michael and the Dragon, walnut, c. 1500-1510, from the collection of M. Chr. Delcourt, Paris, taken from Boccador, I, plate no. 71.
3. Le Beau Dieu, 13th century, Amiens central doorway, taken from Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image, 3rd ed. (France, 1913; rpt. New York: Harper, 1958), p. 44.
4. Marvels from a 13th-century Solinus manuscript, Milan, Ambrosiana, cod. C. 246 inf., fol. 57r, taken from Rudolf Wittkower, Allegory and the Migration of Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 51.
5. Apocalypse, fol. 20r, 14th century, Norman, Metropolitan Museum, Cloisters Collection.
6. The Frogs Ask for a King, 1485 woodcut, taken from Aesopus; Vita et Fabulae, Latine et Italice per Franc. de Tuppò M.CCCC.lxxxv, ed. Carlo de Frede (Naples: Associazione Napoletana, 1968), p. 214.
7. Monsters from Livre des merveilles (Marco Polo), late 14th century, Paris, B.N. fr. 2810, taken from Judy Allen and Jeanne Griffiths, The Book of the Dragon (Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell, 1979), p. 79.
8. Genoese World Map of 1457, taken from Allen, p. 78.
9. The Snake and the File, 1485 woodcut, taken from Aesopus, p. 361.
10. Drawings of serpents copied from Ms. II.4.25, Cambridge University Library, 12th century, taken from T. H. White, The Bestiary (New York: Putnam, 1954; rpt. Capricorn, 1960), pp. 166, 170, 176-77, 180-81.
11. Drawings of serpents copied from various manuscripts, taken from Florence McCulloch, Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), plates I, III, VII, X.

12. Serpents from the Libellus de Natura Animalium, 15th-century bestiary, reprod. J. I. Davis (London: Dawson's, 1958).
13. Jonah and the Whale, marble, 3rd century, Eastern Mediterranean, taken from Francis Huxley, The Dragon (New York: Collier, 1979), p. 46.
14. Dragon, German aquamanile, 12th or 13th century, bronze, Cloisters Collection, taken from R. H. Randall, Jr., A Cloisters Bestiary (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1960), p. 39.
15. Narbonne arch, 12th century, and details (amphisbena and pelican), taken from Bonnie Young and Malcolm Varon, A Walk through the Cloisters (New York: Metropolitan Museum, n.d.), pp. 53-54.
16. St. Michael and the Dragon, 1416, Chantilly, Ms. Lat. 1284, taken from Edmond Pognon, Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry, trans. David Macrae (New York: Crescent, n.d.), p. 123.
17. Monsters on heraldic arms, taken from John Woodward and George Burnett, A Treatise on Heraldry, British and Foreign (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1969), plate 27.
18. Arms of Henry VI of England from a manuscript in the B.M., taken from Peter Hogarth, Dragons (New York: Viking Press, 1979), p. 158.



Figure 1: Saint Martha and the Dragon,
limestone, c. 1515, Church at Arrelle (Aube)



Figure 2: Saint Michael and the Dragon,
walnut, 190 cm., c. 1500-1510,
from the collection of M. Chr. Delcourt, Paris



Figure 3: Le Beau Dieu,
Amiens, central doorway, 13th century

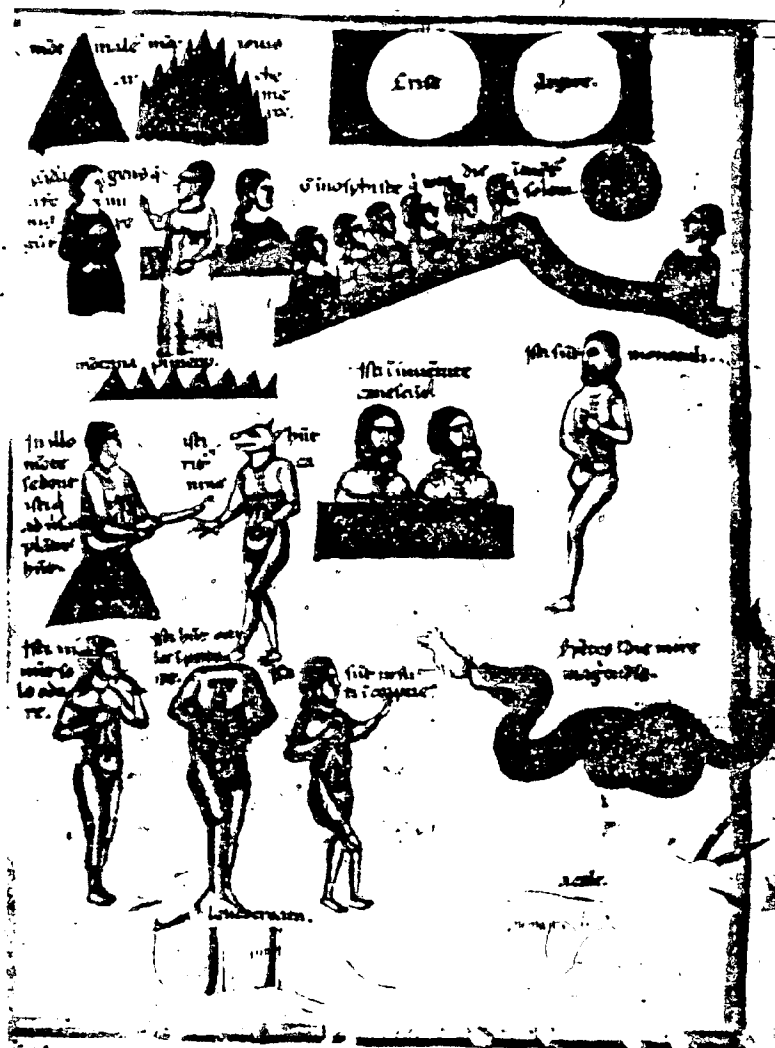


Figure 4: Marvels from a 13th-century Solinus manuscript,
Milan, Ambrosiana, cod. C. 246 inf., fol. 57r



Figure 5: Norman, 14th-century Apocalypse manuscript,
fol. 20r, Cloisters Collection



Figure 6: The Frogs Ask for a King,
1485 woodcut



Figure 7: From the *Livre des merveilles*,
late 14th century, Paris, B.N. fr. 2810

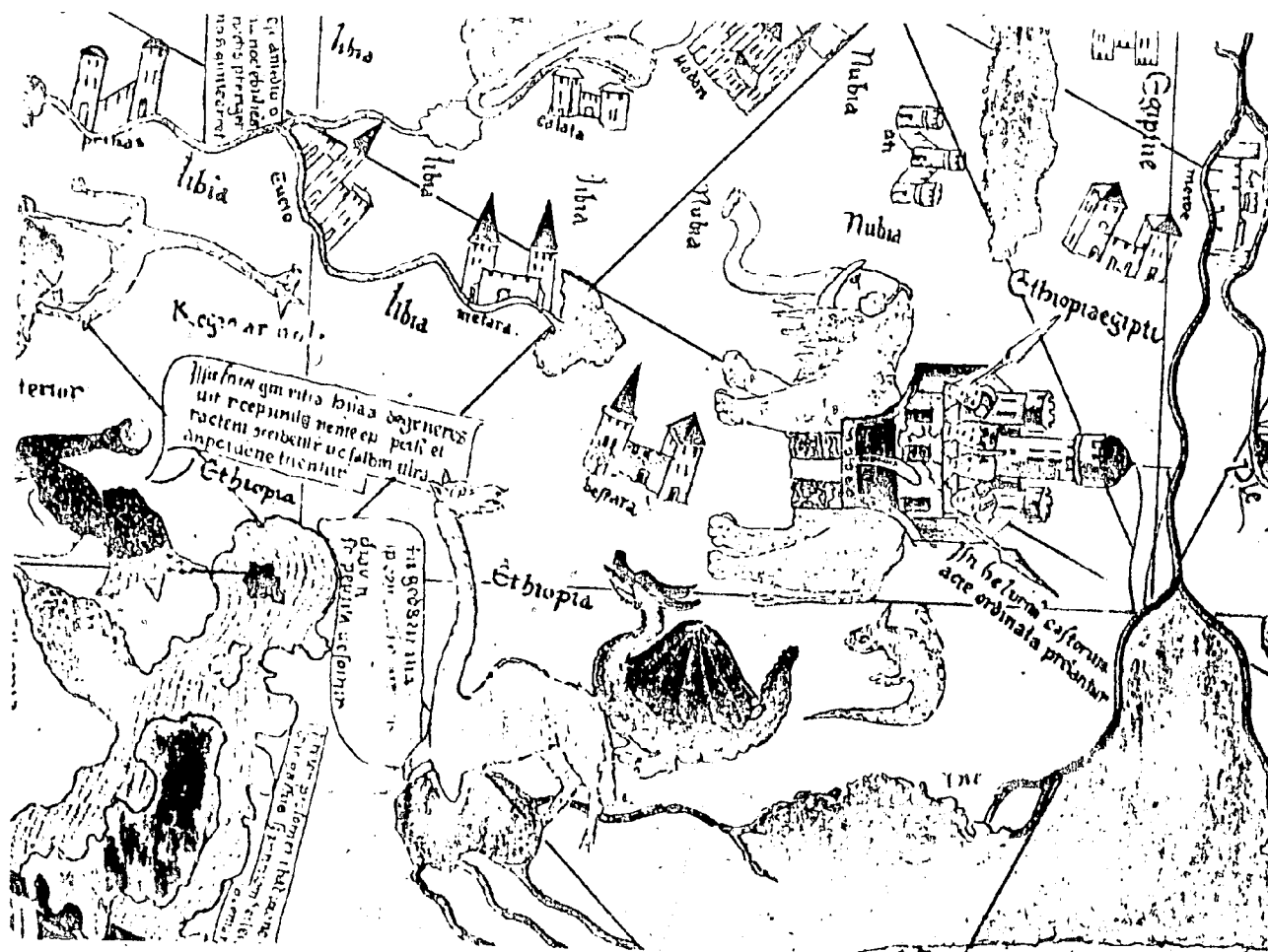
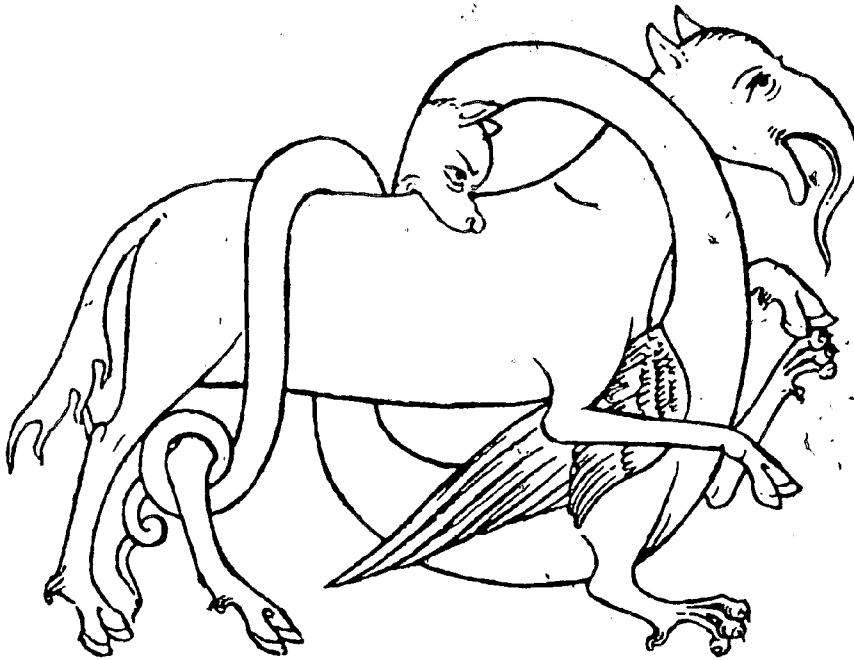


Figure 8: Genoese World Map of 1457



Figure 9: The Snake and the File,
1485 woodcut

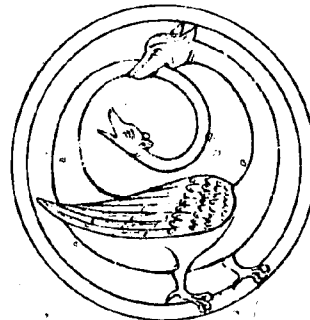
Figure 10:



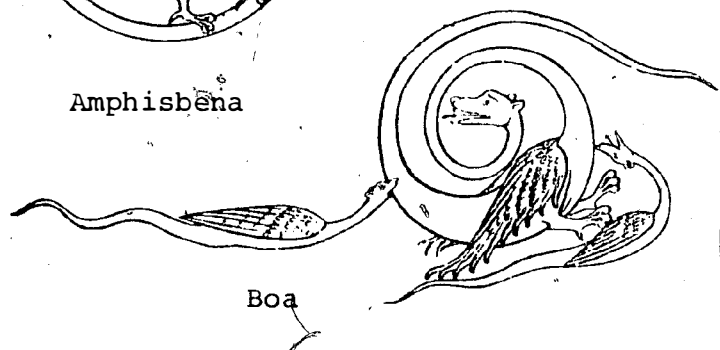
Dragon and
Elephant



Scitalis



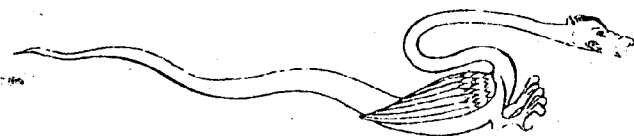
Amphisbena



Boa



Viper

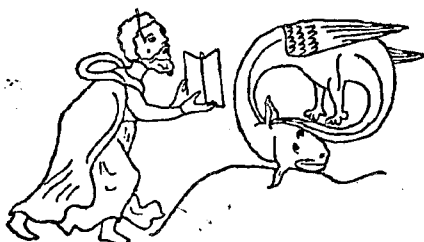


Siren Snake



Dragon

a. B.N., lat. 3630, f. 93
b. B.M., Harleian 3244, f. 59

Peredixion Tree
Bodl. 602, f. 29

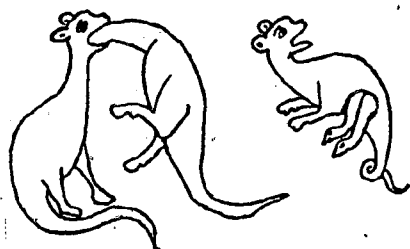
Asp

B.M., Harleian 3244, f. 61v



Amphisbaena

a. Bodl. 764, f. 97
b. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam
Museum, 254, f. 41v



Viper

Bern, Burgerbibliothek 318,
f. 11

Propterea et natura et spiritus talis est quod quilibet vult delectare carnem vel agere arcam vel aspis sopiatur. tunc statim oppellat vinam aurum cum terra vel frondibus et aliam quere oppellat eius sua cunda ne audiat canones vel funum arpe quod statim effert sopitum et sic homo non sibi ter eum.

Talia debet facere quilibet homo qui foras in mundo attendit: non debet laudare illud quod possit corpus et alia maculare et denigrare maculis et peccatis: nisi homo sit deprimatus et de purgatus viciis maculis et peccatis non poterit in celesti gloria habitare. Juxta illud dicitur quod habitabit in tabernaculo tuo aut quis requiescet in motem sanctum tuum. Qui iugreditur sine macula et operatur iustitias.

De Vipera.

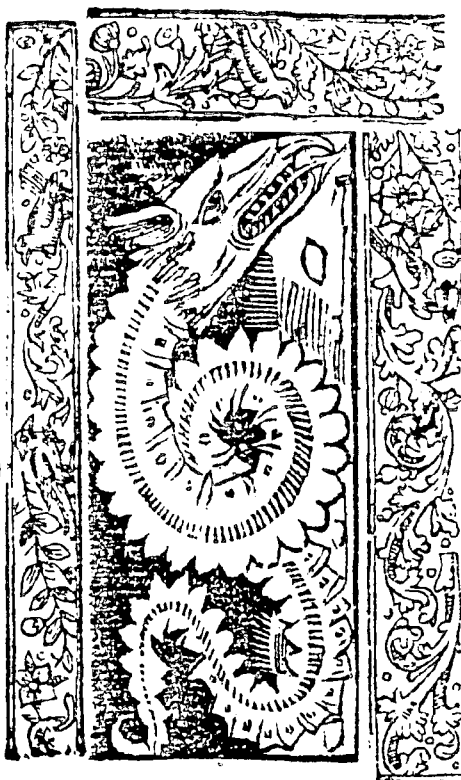


Propterea Vipera talis est quod accipit pro se suis tali modo quod masculus mittit caput suum in os vipere semine et tunc vipera feminam et de gluttit caput masculi et sic moritur masculus et vipera ingravidatur illo capite et comedit et quod parit facit suos filios pro coisatis suas quod

Alii corrumpit coisatas matris et exiunt ex pro coisatas et sic moriuntur pro amf. Ade pro vipera possimus intelligere homines qui committunt homicidia et alia peccata mortalia tales raro possunt evadere qui occidunt quod non percutiunt in peccatis. Juxta illud Qui gladio ferit gladio peribit.

Et per bec quod alii sui matrem iterantur intelligitur operationes malle quas homo facit iter fieri cum quod homo non potest recolligere nisi illud quod seminat Juxta illud augustinus quod seminamus metum et quod damus accipimus.

De Lucrillo.



Lucris est Lucrillus proprietas et natura sua. Lucrillus est quidam serpens valde magnus qui si pringenter dehoraret et deglutiret hominem statim contristatur et toto tempore sue vite est tristis ex eo quod comedit hominem ita quod deinceps non comederet si posset.

Et proprietas Lucrilli nobis notificat et declarat quod habere debemus de peccatis que facimus penitentiam et dolorem nam dum peccamus debemus fortiter contristari et dolere et dei piissime misericordiam implorare: ut sui misericordia nostra debita delectat et expellat Juxta illud dicitur et deus secundum magnam misericordiam suam et secundum multitudinem miserationum suarum delectemur in carnis meam.



Figure 13: Jonah and the Whale,
marble, 3rd century, Eastern Mediterranean

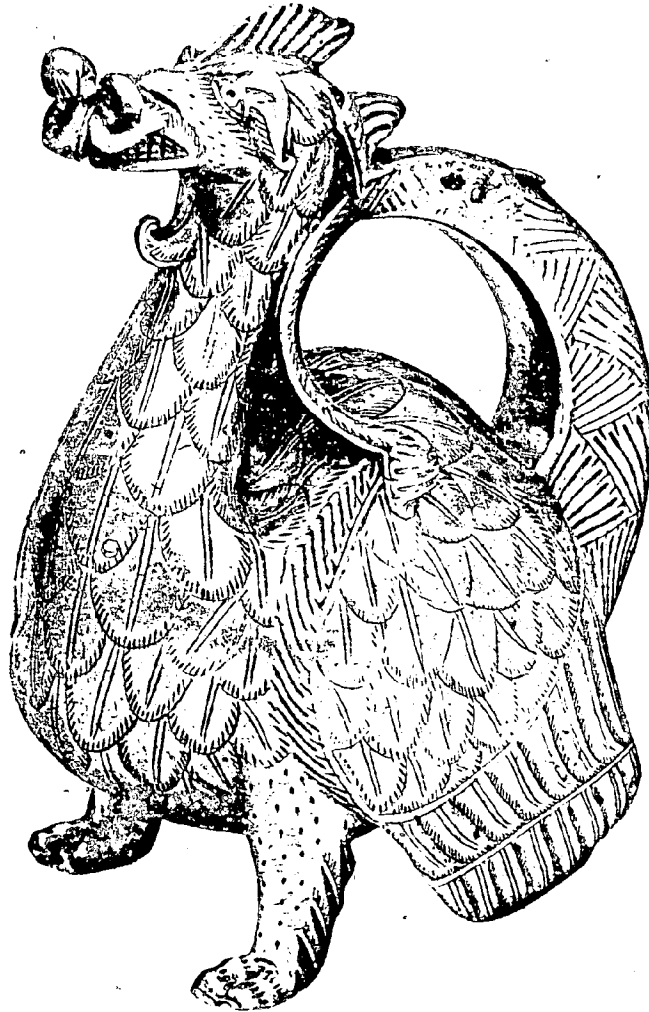
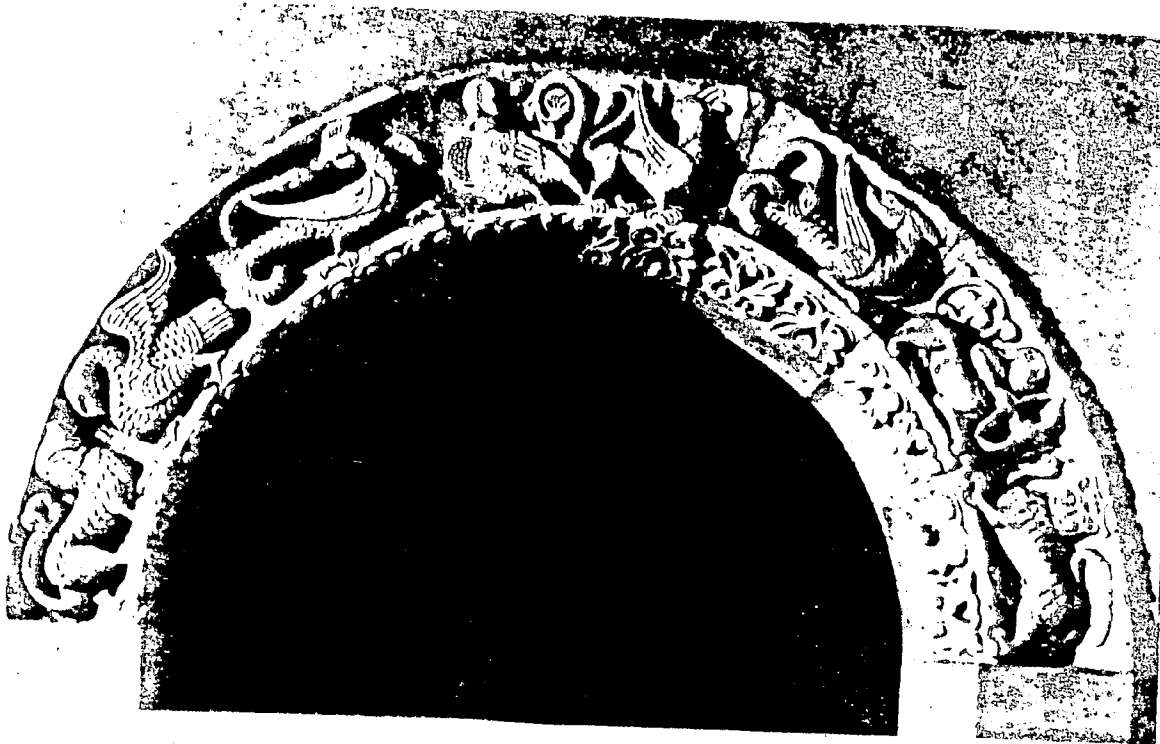


Figure 14: Dragon, German aquamanile,
12th or 13th century, bronze; Cloisters Collection



330

12th-century Narbonne
arch

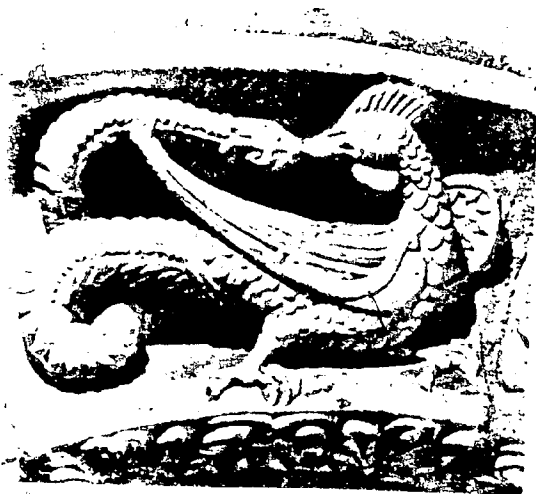
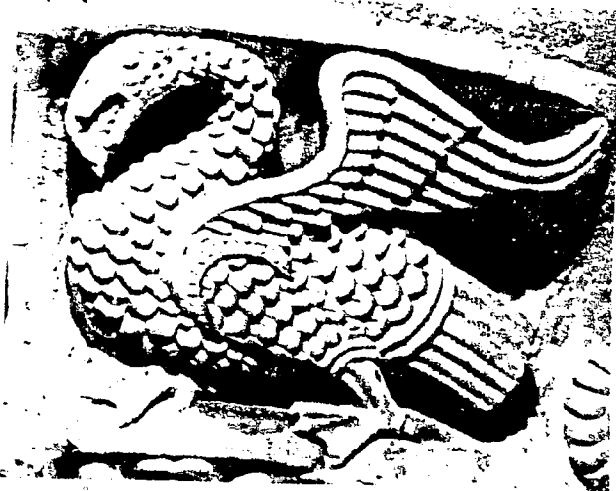


Figure 15



Details (amphisbena
and pelican)

Figure 16:

St. Michael and the
Dragon, Book of
Hours of the Duke
of Berry, 1416

331



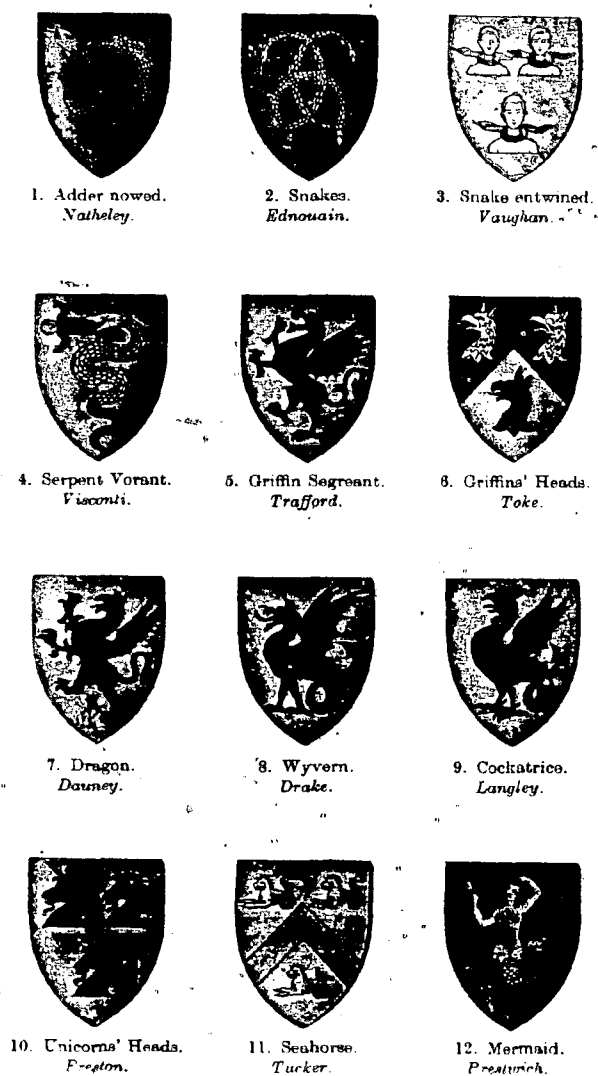


Figure 17: Heraldic Arms



Figure 18: Arms of Henry VI of England

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF MEDIEVAL MONSTER TERMS AND REFERENCES TO SELECTED TEXTS

This glossary consists of monster terms most frequently found in medieval travel accounts, encyclopedias and bestiaries. The definitions following the terms are the briefest and the most standard. References are to works which either influenced or are representative of the medieval natural scientific perception of these creatures. The list, definitions and references have been carefully selected to reflect the medieval emphasis and provide easy access to the major texts. Please note the following abbreviations. Full bibliographical information can be found in the Bibliography.

AEL	Aelianus
ALB	Albertus Magnus
ARIO	Ludovico Ariosto
BARTH	Bartholomaeus Anglicus
BERS	Pierre Bersuire, <u>Opera omnia</u>
BROWNE	Thomas Browne
BRUN	Brunetto Latini
CAT	Catalan Bestiary
DU BART	Guillaume du Bartas
GER	Gervaise
GUIL	Guillaume le Clerc
HER	Herodotus

HON	Honorius de Autun
HOR	Horapollo
HRAB	Hrabanus Maurus
ISID	Isidore of Seville
KTES	Ktesias, see McCrindle
LET	<u>Letter of Alexander</u> , see Rypins
LIB	<u>Libellus de Natura Animalium</u> (15th c.)
LM	<u>Liber Monstrorum</u> , see Haupt
LUC	Lucan
MAND	John Mandeville
MEG	Megasthenes, see McCrindle
MP	Marco Polo, see Benedetto
NECK	Alexander Neckam
PHIL	Philippe de Thaon
PHYS	Latin <u>Physiologus</u> , see Carmody
PIER	Pierre de Beauvais (short version)
PJ	Prester John, see Silverberg
PLIN	Pliny
PS-HU	Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor (<u>De bestiis</u>)
RICH	Richard de Fournival
SOL	Solinus
THEO	Theobaldus
THOM	Thomas de Cantimpré
VIN	Vincent of Beauvais
WHI	White's trans. of a 12th-c. bestiary
WOND	<u>Wonders of the East</u> , see Rypins

amphisbaena (amphisbena, amphivena)--serpent with two heads, one on the end of its tail, sometimes winged and in the form of a basilisk with a second head on the end of its tail. LUC 9:719; PLIN 8:85; SOL 122:8; AEL 8:8, 9:23; ISID 12.4.19; THOM 8:3; PS-HU 3:44 (P.L. 177:101); WHI 176; NECK 2:118; ALB 25:1558; DU BART 198; BROWNE 3:15.

basilisk (cockatrice, cocatrice, regulus, sibilus)--serpent which kills by smell or look, often with cock's head and wings, king of the smaller serpents, only vulnerable to a weasel or a mirror. LUC 9:726, 828; PLIN 8:78, 29:66; SOL 126:12, 127:4; AEL 2:5, 7, 3:31; ISID 12.4.6; HRAB 8:3 (P.L. 111:231); THOM 8:4; PS-HU 2:41 (P.L. 177:100); WHI 168; NECK 2:65, 120; ALB 25:1561; BARTH 18:15 (1023); VIN 20:21-24 and 41 (1473-4, 1481); BRUN 1:140; RICH 125; BERS 1.10.13 (342-43); MAND 206:16; CAT 2:118; HOR 1:1, 2:61; DU BART 197; BROWNE 3:7.

baricus (cf. mantichore)--body and hair of a bear, a man's face, a red head, great mouth, three rows of teeth, outer limbs of a lion, tail of scorpion, runs swiftly, eats men. BARTH 18:975.

bonasus (bonachus, bonnacon)--bull with mane like horse and twisted horns, defeats pursuers by strewing scalding hot dung on them. PLIN 8:40; SOL 168:5; THOM 4:11; PS-HU 3:5 (P.L. 177:84); WHI 33; ALB 22:1361 and 23:1446; BERS 1.10.16 (345).

catoblepas (catoblepon, centicore, yale?)--little body, great head hanging toward earth, guards wells, lethal look. PLIN 8:77; SOL 134:8; AEL 7:5; THOM 4:28; WHI 54; ALB 22:1375; BARTH 18:15 (1024); VIN 19:33 (1401).

centaur (sagittarius, hippocentaur)--top half of body is a man, usually an archer, bottom half of body is a horse. ISID 11.3.37 and 12.1.43; LM 225:8; PJ 144; GER 329-44;

MAND (goat-man) 33:26, (ipotaynes) 194:14.

chimera (chimaera)--fire-breathing, lion forepart, goat in middle and dragon behind, only one in existence, female, sometimes portrayed as a creature with three heads (goat, lion and dragon). SOL 164:13, 220:29; ISID 1.40.4, 11.3.36, and 14.3.46; LM 240:12; THOM 4:23; ALB 22:1374.

dracontopodes (draconcopede)--huge men with tails of dragons. LM 234:49; THOM 8:17; ALB 25:1567; VIN 20:29-33 (1476-79).

dragon (see also worm and serpent)--very large creature, usually reptilian or ophidian, sometimes with two or four legs, with horns, scales, claws, wings, fiery breath, multiple heads, poison, often in caves or by water, guarding something. LUC 6:675, 9:727; PLIN 5:3, 8:32, 61, 99, 10:137, 11:197, 16:234, 29:66, 33:116, 34:76, 37:158; SOL 112:18, 132:17; AEL 2:21, 26, 6:4, 17, 63, 8:11, 10:25, 48, 11:2, 17, 26, 12:39, 15:21, 16:16, 39; PHYS 40-41, 55-56, 57; ISID 12.2.16, 12.4.4; HRAB 8:3 (P.L. 111:229-30); WOND 59:11; PHIL 472, 1439, 2485; THOM 8:16; PS-HU 2:24 (P.L. 177:71); WHI 165; NECK 2:145-47; PJ 144; GER 501-620; GUIL 2069-2238; PIER 76-78; ALB 25:1565-67; BARTH 18:37 (1053); VIN 20:29-33 (1476-79); BRUN 1:27, 141; RICH 94, 130-31; BERS 1.10.31 (364-66) and 3:524-25; MAND 15:18, 28:15, 144:27, 216:3; CAT 2:118; DU BART 193, 197.

formicaleon (mirmicoleon, myrmicoleon, giant ant, dog-sized ant, ant-lion)--ant as large as a dog, guards gold, eats other ants. HER 3:102-5; MEG 96; PLIN 11:111, 33:66; SOL 134:10; AEL 3:4; ISID 12.3.9-10; HRAB 8:2 (P.L. 111:227); WOND 55:7; PHIL 1055-1108; THOM 9:22; PS-HU 2:29 (P.L. 177:76); GUIL 961-1020; ALB 26:1586-87; BARTH 18:52 (1073); VIN 20:134-35 (1536).

griffin (griffon, gryphon, grypi)--body of lion, with wings and mask and claws of eagle, guards gold. HER 3:116; KTES 17; PLIN 7:2, 10:136, 33:66; SOL 86:13; AEL 4:27; ISID 12.2.17; HRAB 8:1 (P.L. 111:222); THOM 5:52; PS-HU 3:4 (P.L. 177:84); WHI 22; BARTH 12:19 (538), 18:54 (1074); MP 343; MAND 194:19; LIB; DU BART 177; BROWNE 3:11.

harpy--head or face of woman on large bird. LM 233:44; THOM 5:4; ALB 23:1439; VIN 16:94 (1211); ARIO 33:111, 38:28.

hippogriff (hippogriffin)--body of horse, with wings and mask and claws of eagle. ARIO 4:13, 4:33-35, 10:94, 22:22.

hydrus (enhydrus, ydre)--aquatic serpent, attacks crocodile by sliding in its mouth and burrowing out its side. And hydra (legends confused)--serpent with multiple heads (cf. serpent). PHYS 35; ISID 12.4.22; LM 246:3, 251:21; HRAB 8:1, 3 (P.L. 111:225, 232-33); PHIL 633-720; THOM 8:21; PS-HU 2:7 (P.L. 177:60); WHI 178; GER

281-304; GUIL 1643-1728; PIER 74; ALB 25:1568; VIN

20:35 (1479); RICH 67; LIB.

lamia--head and breasts of woman, body of four-footed animal.

THOM 4:56; ALB 22:1409; VIN 19:65; BERS 1.10.61 (385).

leucocrote (leucrota, cencrocata, crocuta)--swiftest animal, size of donkey, breast and shins of lion, head of horse, teeth are one continuous bone, makes a sound like people talking. PLIN 8:74; SOL 189:4; THOM 4:27, 62; PS-HU

3:7 (P.L. 177:85); WHI 48; HON 1:13 (P.L. 172:124);

ALB 22:1409; VIN 19:34, 77 (1401, 1424); BRUN 1:191.

lertices--asses' ears, sheep's wool and bird's feet. WOND

58:15.

mantichore (manticora, mantiger, montegre, satyral, martikhora)--body of lion, face of man, tail like the sting of a scorpion, three-fold rows of teeth, shrill, flute-like voice. KTES 11; PLIN 8:75, 107; SOL 190:1; AEL

4:21; THOM 4:72; PS-HU 3:8 (P.L. 177:85-86); WHI 51;

HON 1:13 (P.L. 172:124); ALB 22:1413; BARTH 18:975;

VIN 19:90 (1432); BRUN 1:192; BERS 1.10.64 (395); DU

BART 201.

marvellous races of men--This is a broad category of creatures which includes the Antipodes (men with their feet pointing backward who live on the other side of the earth), the Cynocephali (men with dog's heads), and the Sciopodes (men with one giant foot which shades them when they sleep). Marvels are found in many texts, among them:

HER 4:191; KTES 15-34; MEG 73-82; PLIN 7:2; SOL 131:9,
137, 187:22; AEL 4:46; ISID 9.2.33 and 11 and 12.2.32;
LM 226:12, 228:16, 235:53; WOND 52-65; THOM 3; HON 1:12
(P.L. 172:124); BARTH 15:73 (660); MP 287-89; MAND
160:14, 205:28, 215:19; DU BART 147; BROWNE 4:11.

onocentaur--top half of body is a man, bottom half (four
legs) is an ass. AEL 17:9; PHYS 25-26; LM 226:11;
WOND 60:3; THEO 62; PHIL 1106-34; THOM 4:82; PS-HU 2:3
(P.L. 177:58), 2:33 (P.L. 177:78); PIER 68; ALB 22:1417;
BARTH 18:77 (1096); VIN 19:97 (1435); BERS 1.10.73 (401).

phoenix (fenix)--Egyptian bird which lives over 500 years,
only one in existence, rises from its death pyre to
live again. HER 2:73; PLIN 10:3; SOL 149:18; AEL 6:58;
PHYS 20; ISID 12.7.22; HRAB 8:6 (P.L. 111:246); PHIL
2217-2322; THOM 5:45; PS-HU 1:49 (P.L. 177:48); WHI 125;
NECK 1:34-35; PJ 144; GER 1009-52; GUIL 739-820; PIER
65; ALB 23:1493; BARTH 12:14 (534); VIN 16:74 (1200);
BRUN 1:162; MAND 34:11; CAT 2:120; LIB; HOR 1:34-35,
2:57; DU BART 173; BROWNE 3:12.

pilosus (faun, incubus, cf. satyr, wild man)--half human,
half beast. THOM 4:90; ALB 22:1420; BARTH 18:82 (1101)
and (980); BERS 1.10.79.

salamander (stellio)--lizard which kills with one blow,
lives in flame and can extinguish fires. PLIN 10:188,
29:76; AEL 2:31; PHYS 52; ISID 12.4.36; LM 250:14;
HRAB 8:3 (P.L. 111:233); PHIL 1305-60; THOM 8:30;

PS-HU 2:16 (P.L. 177:65); WHI 182; GUIL 2823-82; PIER 83; ALB 25:1570-72; BARTH 18:90 (1108); VIN 20:63-64 (1494-95); RICH 37; MP 73; LIB; BROWNE 3:14.

satyr (faun, incubus, cf. pilosus, wild man)--half man and half beast, usually goat, sometimes shaggy man with horse's tail. MEG 59; PLIN 7:24, 8:216; SOL 128:9, 137:12; AEL 16:21; ISID 12.2.33; LM 224:6, 234:46; WHI 36; BARTH 18:46 (1067); BERS 1.10.39 (375); DU BART 147. serpents, giant, winged or multi-headed (cf. dragon, giant worm). HER 2:74-75, 3:107-9; MEG 54, 59; PLIN 8:14; SOL 188:33, 145:11; AEL 16:41; LM 246:1-2, 247:4ff.; WOND 53:4, 14; LET 19; HON 1:13 (P.L. 172:125); VIN 20:13 (1468); MP 189.

siren (syren, seraine, mermaid)--human to the navel, lower parts like bird or fish or both, usually female, tempts men with singing. MEG 175; AEL 16:2-21; PHYS 25; ISID 11.3.30; LM 224:7; THEO 60; PHIL 1361-1414; THOM 6:46; PS-HU 1:32 (P.L. 177:78); WHI 134; GER 305-28; GUIL 1053-1112; PIER 68; ALB 24:1546; BARTH 18:95 (1113); VIN 17:129 (1314); BRUN 1:136; RICH 46; BERS 1.10.90 (413-14); LIB.

tarrande (parandrus)--big as an ox, cloven feet, tined horns, head of stag, coloured like a bear and shaggy, able to assume different shapes. SOL 134:15.

unicorn (monosceros, alicorn, rhinosceros)--size of small horse, single straight horn, cloven feet, horn is

protection against poison, fierce animal, captured only by virgin. KTES 26; MEG 57; PLIN 6:173, 185, 8:71; SOL 190:9; AEL 3:41; PHYS 31; ISID 12.2.12-13; HRAB 8:1 (P.L. 111:220); THEO Appen. 1; PHIL 393-460; THOM 4:69; PS-HU 2:6 (P.L. 177:59); WHI 20, 43; PJ 141; HON 1:13 (P.L. 172:124-25); GER 239-80; GUIL 1375-1476; PIER 71; ALB 22:1413, 1426; BARTH 18:88 (1106); VIN 19:91, 104, 114 (1432, 1439, 1444); BRUN 1:198; RICH 42, 46; MP 57, 283, 287; BERS 1.10.85 (409); MAND 216:7; CAT 1:89, 2:58; LIB; DU BART 201; BROWNE 3:23.

wild man (incubus, faun, sylvestres, cf. pilosus, satyr)-- shaggy, walks on hands and feet, rough skin, teeth like dog's. MEG 74-75; PLIN 8:80; SOL 188:9; MAND 148:13, 198:5, 215:19.

worm, giant (cf. dragon, serpent). KTES 28; AEL 5:3.

APPENDIX 2

Herodotus Hist. (5th c. B.C.)

phoenix
winged snakes
giant ants
griffins
cynocephali
Arismaspians
race with eyes in chest

Ktesias Ind. (c. 398 B.C.) (frags.)

martikhora
griffins
unicorn-like animal
giant worm
pygmies
cynocephali
men who drink only milk
race with 8 fingers and toes
race with large ears
giants
men with tails
one-legged Monosceli
Sciopodae
race with eyes in shoulders

Megasthenes Ind. (303 B.C.) (frags.)

winged serpents
unicorn-like animal
giant ants
satyr-like animal
sphinx (ape)
sea monsters
mermaid
races with:
 no nostrils, legs contorted
 3, 5 spans in height
 wild men (heels in front, or no mouths, or 8 toes
 on feet)

Megasthenes (cont'd.)

races with (cont'd.)

ears large enough to sleep in
 ears of dog, one eye in middle of forehead,
 shaggy breasts
 lifespan of 200, 1000 years
 heads of dogs
 no mouths
 feet turned backward

Lucan Phar. (c. 62 A.D.)

amphisbaena
 basilisk
 dragon

Pliny Nat. hist. (79)

unicorn	giant serpent
amphisbaena	giant ants
dragon	leucrota
basilisk	catoblepas
bonasus	werewolf
griffin	Antipodes
phoenix	Cynocephali
salamander	marvels
satyr	

Solinus Coll. (218)

griffon	phoenix
dragon	sea monster
amphisbene	chimera
cockatrice	bonasus
sphinx, satyr (apes)	leucocrote
celphi	manticora
catobleb	unicorn
giant ants	gorgon
tarrande	marvels
satyr	

APPENDIX 3

Aelianus De nat. (220)

dog-fish	amphisbaena
basilisk	dragon
salamander	satyr
unicorn	onocentaur
mantichore	Triton
gryphon	Cynocephalus
phoenix	giant ants
catoblepon	marvels

Isidore Etym. (630)

cynocephalus and satyr (apes)
dragon
basilisk
amphisbaena
hydra
phoenix
grypes
giant ants
formicoleon
unicorn
salamandra
centaur
chimera
siren
marvels

Wonders of the East (9th C.?)

gorgon-like creature
two-headed serpent
giant ants
lertices
dragon
homodurii (onocentaurii)
marvels

Letter of Alexander (9th C.?)

army of serpents
 giant doves
 bats with human faces
 Grendel-type monster
 marvels (some versions)

Liber Monstrorum (7th-9th C.)

satyrs	satyrs and incubones
sirens	dracontopodes
hippocentauri	Minotaur
onocentauri	Triton
Cyclops	Antipodas
Scylla	chiméra
Ichthyophagos	Cynopenos
Cynocephali	Cerberus
woman with camel feet	dog-headed fish
fire-breathing creatures	Lernean serpent
Proteus	two-headed serpent
Gorgons	hydra
Argus	giant serpent
Circe monsters	salamander
Harpy	marvels (many more)
Eumenides	

Honorius Augustodunensis De imag. (1156)

mantichora
 monoceros
 giant snakes
 ceucocroca
 marvels

APPENDIX 4

Thomas de Cantimpré Liber (c. 1284)

bonachus	siren
chimera	ansibena
corocrote	basilisk
cathapleba	dragon
lamia	dracontopode
leucrocata	idrus
monoceros	salamandra
manticora	sirene serpents
onocentaur	formicarum leo
pegasus	giant ants
pilosis	marvels
unicorn	griffin
fenix	harpy
sea monsters	

Albertus Magnus De anim. (1250s)

bonachus	syrenae
cathablepa	anfysbena
chymera	basylyscus
leucrocotha	dragon
monoceros	draconcopodes
manticora	hydra/ -us
onocentaurus	salamander
pegasus	syren snakes
pilosus	formicaleon--giant ants
unicorn	marvels
bonasa (bird)	harpy
fenix	lamia
sea monsters	

Barth. Anglicus De prop. (1260)

dragon
baricos (manticore)
basilisk
catoblepas
griffin

Barth. Anglicus (cont'd.)

mermaid/siren
 phoenix
 satyr
 salamandra
 unicorn (rhino?)
 formicaleone
 onocentaurus
 pilosus (incubus)
 marvels (in satyr)

Vincent of Beauvais Spec. nat. (c. 1264)

phoenix	monstrous serpent
harpy	basilisk (and regulus)
sea monsters	dragon
syrene	draconcopede
catoblepas	enhydrus/ -a
leucocrata	salamander
lamia	giant ants
mantichore	formicoleon
onocentaur	marvels
unicorn	

Brunetto Latini Li livres (1266)

siren
 basilisk
 dragon
 phoenix
 lucrotes
 mantichore
 unicorn
 marvels

APPENDIX 5

Marco Polo Milione (1295)

unicorn
salamander (metal)
giant clawed snake
tailed men
dog-headed men
gryphons (big eagles)

Odoric of Pordenone (1330)

Tartar lamb
marvels

Mandeville Travels (1397)

dragon
goat-men
phoenix
hound-headed people
centaur
griffon
basilisk
unicorn
marvels

Thomas Browne Errors (1646)

basilisk
griffin
phoenix
salamander
amphisbena
unicorn horn
marvels

BESTIARIES

FIRST FAMILY

Latin Physiologus (Y, A, B, C,)

phenix (not in C)
syrena et onocentaurus
hydrus
salamandra
unicornis (not in Y)

(B² Is has add. from Isidore)

SECOND FAMILY

(12th Century)

Above plus:
dragon
bonnacon
leucrota
manticora
basilisk
amphivena

THIRD FAMILY

(13th Century)

Above plus:
chimera
Cerberus
marvels

FOURTH FAMILY

(15th Century)

All the above
Moral often omitted

APPENDIX 6

Hrabanus Maurus De rerum nat. (9th C.)

unicorn
gryphes
satyr and cynocephali (apes)
enhydrus
dog-ants
dragon
basilisk
salamander
phoenix
marvels

Theobaldus Phys. (11th-12th C.)

siren
onocentaur

Philippe de Thaon Best. (1121)

monoscerus	sylio (salâmander)
pantere et dragun	serena
idrus	fenix
onoscentaurus	formicaleon

Gervaise Best. (1200)

unicorne	centaurus
idres et cocadrile	phenix
sereine	dragon

Alex. Neckam De nat. (1180)

phoenix
basilisk
amphisbaena
dragon

Pseudo Hugh of St. Victor De best. (12th C.)

amphisbaena	manticor
basilisk	onocentaur
bonasus	phoenix
dragon	siren
gryphs	unicorn
hydrus	salamander
leucrota	ant-lion

Guillaume le Clerc Best. (1211)

fenis	pantere/dragon
sereine	salamandre
unicorne	formicaleon
idrus	

Pierre de Beauvais Best. (1217)

(short version)	(long version)
seraine (and onocentaur)	all in short version plus:
fenis	l'arpie
unicorne	baselicoc
idre	grifon
salemandre	centicore (catoblepas)
panther/dragon	

Richard de Fournival Best. (13th C.)

salamander
 unicorn
 ydre
 sea monster
 dragon
 cocatris
 siren

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